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ABSTRACT

Issues facing schools, teachers, and policy-makers in the expansion of elementary school instruction in modern second languages are discussed, particularly in the context of Scotland's educational system. An introductory chapter defines key terminology, the transition from pilot programs to institutionalization, and discusses briefly the distinction between "second" and "foreign" languages. The second chapter outlines five different instructional approaches and offers examples of foreign language initiatives in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK), Europe, and some other countries. Objectives and difficulties encountered are examined. Several concepts in second language learning and use are considered in the third chapter, including use of language for real communication, language as a dynamic system of rules and strategies, communicative competence, "language acquisition" versus "language learning," progression of skills, and proficiency. In chapter four, evidence of instructional outcomes from UK elementary schools, immersion research, research on specific aspects of second language teaching (intensive teaching, first-language literacy, and second-to-first language transfer), and learner age is offered. A final chapter draws conclusions concerning starting age, implications of language policy for elementary language teaching, choice of approach, teacher qualifications, and implications for secondary education. (MSE)

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Teaching Modern Languages at Primary School

APPROACHES AND IMPLICATIONS

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Richard Johnstone

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Teaching Modern Languages at Primary School

Approaches and Implications

Richard Johnstone

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The present publication is based on various research and development initiatives that have taken place in Scotland and elsewhere in the world in relation to modern languages at primary school. My own involvement allows me to offer four perspectives. As a member of the team in the Education Department of Stirling University conducting the evaluation of the national pilot projects in Scotland, I can offer the perspective of someone who has been conducting research in the area. As a reviewer of research published in international journals, I can comment on research findings from other countries. As a participant in Council of Europe networks, I can comment on developments elsewhere in Europe. Finally, as part of the team working at the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, I have become aware of the sorts of enquiry that teachers, student-teachers, journalists, broadcasters and others have addressed to us and to which we have attempted to respond. It is my intention to bring these different sources of information together in such a way as to set current developments in Scotland in a historical and international context.

In drawing on these sources, I have benefited greatly from interaction with various friends and colleagues. Particular thanks go to Tony Giovanazzi for providing background information on developments in France, Italy and Spain that supplemented what I myself had been able to obtain. Ian Boyes HMCI, Pat Dobson, Alison Hurrell, Isobel McGregor HMI, Sandy Wilson and several others have regularly kept me abreast of current developments in policy and on the ground, not only in Scotland but elsewhere also. Talking of 'elsewhere', let me also offer thanks to friends and colleagues in other countries, including those who have collaborated in Council of Europe networks, and particularly Peter Edelenbos (Holland) and Ulrich Bliesener (Germany). I would also like to express my indebtedness to my various colleagues at Stirling—Sally Brown, Lesley Low, Jill Duffield and Anne Pirrie of the Education Department, and Lottie Gregory and Val Hamilton of Scottish CILT. Finally, I am grateful to the staff in Information Services at SCRE for their skilled and patient support in editing and presenting the text.

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Richard Johnstone
October 1994

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1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world there has been an upsurge of interest in the learning of foreign or second languages by children in primary schools. In what is now the European Union this interest has been sharpened by the advent of the Single Market, bringing with it prospects not only of vocational mobility, languages for export, international joint ventures, electronic information networks, increased travel and tourism, but also of cultural and educational links, and even shared identity within the one community. Scotland, which in the past has lagged behind most other countries in its provision of foreign languages, has made serious attempts to implement a variety of measures, including national and regional pilot projects that have been introducing French, German, Spanish and Italian into primary schools, with plans to extend this considerably beyond the initial trials by the mid 1990s.

In the light of these initiatives, a great deal has already been published on the subject of language-learning at primary school, but this has, in the main, been written by specialists for other specialists. My main purpose in this book is to address a wider and different readership. The groups I have in mind include: teachers and student-teachers who may have a direct involvement in teaching a foreign language to learners in primary or early secondary, senior school staff, regional officials, and last, but by no means least, parents.

All of these have major responsibilities in providing different sorts of support for children's language learning. Through no fault of their own, such groups may feel unsure as to what the real research evidence is and may therefore feel caught between conflicting claims, for example on the age or ages at which it is appropriate to introduce a foreign or second language, the methods and approaches that might be adopted, and the outcomes that might reasonably be expected at particular points.

WHAT DOES 'MODERN LANGUAGES' MEAN?

It is important at the start to state how certain key terms will be used throughout this book.

- ***Foreign Language*** (or, ***FL***)

A language that is generally not widely used within the particular community. For most people in Scotland, French, German, Spanish and Italian are foreign languages.

- ***Second Language*** (or, ***SL***)

A language that is used by a significant group within the community. An English-speaker in Canada will learn French as a second language because there is a significant population of French-speakers in Canada, especially in Quebec.

- ***First Language*** (or, ***L1***)

The first language that the child acquires, or the dominant language that the child uses. For most Scots children this is a variety of Scots English. For others

it may be Gaelic, Bengali, Cantonese etc. Bilingual children may be said to have two first languages, or possibly (depending on circumstances) a first and a strong second language. It is possible for a child's dominant language to change, as for example in the case of children who acquire (say) Gaelic in the home but gradually lose this to English as they grow up.

■ ***Modern Language*** (or, ***ML***)

I am using this as an overarching term to cover all of the above. Often the term is used instead of Foreign Languages, but that is not the sense intended in these pages. My main focus will be on foreign languages (FL), but it would be irresponsible to discuss their learning, teaching and use at primary school without reference to children's first (L1) and possibly second (SL) languages. That is why the title opts for modern languages.

MOVING FROM TRIAL SCHEMES TO WIDER PROVISION

Like several other countries, Scotland has reached an important phase in its development of foreign languages at primary school. National and regional experimental schemes (referred to hereafter as 'pilot projects') have been in operation since the late 1980s and there is a widespread feeling that they have been generally successful, particularly in promoting a favourable attitude to foreign-language learning. The main staffing model used in the pilots has been based on teachers from secondary schools making regular visits to their associated primary schools, in order to work alongside primary-school classteachers. However, much more reliance will have to be placed on the primary-school classteacher when provision becomes more widespread, or generalised, across the country after the pilot phase has been completed.

Accordingly, many questions arise. Can the generalisation phase possibly be as successful as the pilot phase, given the much greater demands it will place on primary teachers? In what ways will an adequate supply of appropriately-trained primary teachers be guaranteed? What indeed is meant by an adequate supply? What forms of training and further support will these teachers require? Will they be able to cope with the linguistic and other demands of introducing a foreign language alongside their other responsibilities for teaching their classes? What assumptions ought we to be able to make concerning the age at which it is most appropriate for children in Scottish primary schools to begin learning a foreign language? What outcomes is society entitled to expect? What principles ought to apply at the point of transition from primary to secondary schooling? What aims ought to be established, and on what basis?

It is impossible to answer all of these questions convincingly. Nonetheless, I hope that my text will at least clarify and illuminate some of them, enabling those whose responsibility it is to take matters forward to do so with due regard to such research and other findings as appear relevant.

FOREIGN AND SECOND LANGUAGES

The distinction already made between foreign and second languages does work in a rough-and-ready way. However, it is not always easy to distinguish

objectively between the two. To some extent it is a psychological matter, depending upon the learner's feelings about it. It is possible to be required to learn a second language and to feel that it is very foreign—or vice-versa.

Foreign and second languages do tend to differ in terms of exposure and motivation:

■ *Exposure*

It is often easier to gain exposure to a second than to a foreign language, unless the foreign language is English. Indeed, one of the major problems that foreign-language teachers in the UK have always had to face has been that they have not only had to teach the language but in addition have had to accept responsibility for exposing their pupils to it. Teachers of English as a foreign language in countries such as Germany, Denmark and Holland, on the other hand, are able to assume that their pupils will obtain a considerable amount of exposure to English out of school through TV, radio, records and magazines, and so there is less pressure on them in the classroom.

■ *Motivation*

The motivation for learning a second language is often high, particularly when the second language is spoken by a socially prestigious group, because, as a language of the country, it is often (though not always) reinforced through the educational system. There may also be powerful cultural, political and commercial reasons for learning it. However this frequently does not apply to foreign languages where perception of 'need' may not be strong. Native speakers of English, in particular, have often had difficulty in perceiving a need to learn any other language, be this a foreign language or even another language of the United Kingdom.

■ *Is there a problem?*

Despite the distinctions made above between foreign and second languages, let us be very cautious in applying them to young children. They are largely adult distinctions. Children, after all, cannot be expected to possess an adult concept of foreignness and accordingly may not distinguish as readily as do adults between what is real and what is imaginary, what is possible and what is not possible, and what is foreign and what is not foreign.

Within the UK, the term foreign-language learning is often loaded with threatening connotations for the many adults who may have had a bad experience in their own past, when vainly trying to learn a foreign language at school. We don't want to impose adult hang-ups on children for whom acquiring an additional means of expression (foreign or second language) may not be as problematical as learning a foreign language undoubtedly was for older generations.

It is appropriate to bear in mind that some 60–70% of the world's population are bilingual, in the sense that they have acquired a functional use of two or more languages, though not necessarily for the same purposes. Most bilinguals pick up their languages informally in naturalistic settings such as the family, the community, the religious group and the playgroup in which two or

more languages happen to be used. Human beings are therefore not 'wired-up' for one language alone. On the contrary, provided that the setting is supportive, bilingualism (or multilingualism) is the norm and monolingualism the exception, or, perhaps, the 'problem'.

Unfortunately, within the UK, the situation is generally perceived exactly in the reverse, with monolingualism seen as the norm and bilingualism as the problem. Although many UK primary classrooms are not self-evidently natural settings for bilingualism (for example there probably isn't a bilingual teacher), it is nonetheless possible to create something of a bilingual atmosphere. In such cases, an advantage of the introduction of an additional language at a relatively early age is that children do not read problems into situations to the extent that adults do. They may, therefore, make good progress in picking the language up naturally before it is perceived as a problem.

■ *Learning your neighbour's language*

In the case of children at primary school, the overlap between foreign and second language learning may be exemplified by reference to continental Europe. There, there are several cases of school systems on one side of a frontier encouraging pupils to learn the language of the country across the border, in the spirit of learning the language of their neighbour: *"Apprends la langue de ton voisin"*. In a part of Germany bordering on France, for example, there has been a major initiative (Pelz, 1991) encouraging eight-year-olds to learn the language of their neighbours across the border. Although strictly speaking in such cases the language may be foreign, it is often the intention to encourage a feeling of belonging to the one wider community.

■ *From foreign to second language?*

Danish friends report that English has assumed the status of second rather than foreign language within the administrative middle-class in Denmark. Who knows? Is it conceivable that in due course—as a wider sense of belonging to the one multilingual European community develops—French, German, Italian, Spanish and other languages may be perceived in Scotland as tending towards second rather than foreign language status? Such a proposition at present seems unreal and certainly a long way off. Nonetheless, the impact of the introduction of foreign languages to all primary schools, allied to the gradually increasing impact of the Single Market on the workforce, makes it likely that, in the future, languages other than English will become considerably less 'foreign' than they at present appear to be.

2

DEVELOPMENTS PAST AND PRESENT

This chapter outlines five teaching approaches that have been adopted in various countries in providing a foreign or second language for children at primary school. It then highlights a variety of initiatives, some national and others local, which set an international context within which to consider what is being attempted in Scotland. Finally, it pinpoints problems relating to resources, time and starting-age that will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

MODELS OF TEACHING APPROACH

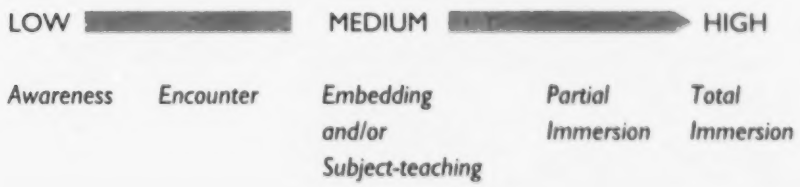
Five different approaches affecting foreign or second languages at primary school are set out below.

Let us distinguish between:

- ***awareness***
raising awareness of language and culture
- ***encounter***
making a brief acquaintance with one or more additional languages
- ***subject-teaching***
teaching an additional language as a school subject
- ***embedding***
embedding an additional language in the primary school curriculum
- ***immersion***
teaching the curriculum in whole or in part through the medium of the additional language, but at no disadvantage to the child's first language and culture.

These models differ in the amount and intensity of use to which the additional language, whether foreign or second, is put.

Figure 1: Amount/intensity of foreign/second language use



In practice, the five models are not self-contained. They can be combined in different ways. Indeed, it will be argued that for Scottish circumstances it is appropriate to favour the 'embedding' model, but for this to subsume the 'awareness' model within it. What the various models have in common is that they relate to the teaching, learning and use of a foreign or second language in

primary schools. As such they differ from what happens when children informally 'pick up' and use a foreign or second language in naturalistic settings out of school, as for example when a Scots child spends much of the summer holidays in Germany playing with German children of the same age and informally picks up some German in the process—often much more quickly than his or her parents.

Before discussing the five models in greater detail, it is necessary to distinguish between them and two other possibilities that relate to the first language of children from minority-language groups.

■ *First language submersion*

This has the same basic formula as immersion but with children from indigenous or migrant minority groups with a first language different from the majority group. There is a tendency for such children to under-achieve because their first language and culture are not valued or made use of at school. Their language and identity are submerged in the second (majority) language and culture. In Scotland, this could happen in the case of children from Gaelic-speaking homes who received all of their primary education through the medium of English. Their first (Gaelic) language and culture would thereby be submerged.

■ *First language maintenance*

Here, children from minority groups with different first languages from the majority group receive an important part of their primary schooling through the medium of their first language, thereby contributing to the maintenance of the minority language and culture within the society and to the child's healthy cognitive and social development. An example of this in Scotland would be children from Gaelic-speaking homes who received a major part of their primary education through Gaelic, as happens in the increasing number of Gaelic-medium units that are being established in Scottish primary schools. In such cases the first (Gaelic) language and culture are maintained, not submerged.

■ *Awareness*

An approach based on awareness does not aim primarily to develop communicative competence in an additional language. Instead, it aims to sensitise children more generally to the nature, purposes and structure of language (language awareness) or to aspects of the cultures in which particular languages are spoken (cultural awareness). Typically, an important component in awareness programmes (cf Hawkins, 1984) is the child's own culture and first language (for example its standard form and regional and social varieties), as the basis for comparison with those elsewhere. A language awareness component will involve much discussion in the first language related to the vocabulary, structure and sounds of a number of languages, in order to give pupils an opportunity to discover aspects that are common and others that are language-specific. It will focus, for example, on words, or roots of words, that are common across languages, thereby showing children how different

languages are related to each other. An assumption underlying this approach is that children's understanding of the concept of 'language' will be strengthened if the concept is approached through a number of languages rather than one language alone.

'Awareness' can prove particularly useful in classrooms where there is a mix of children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The primary-school classteacher can encourage children to bring small elements of their Bengali, Cantonese, Polish etc with them into the class, enabling all children in the class to understand and say a few phrases in each language and to discuss aspects of each culture.

Awareness may be viewed as educationally desirable in itself, justifiable within the language component of a primary school curriculum and ultimately turning into linguistics when studied in higher education. It may also be viewed as supporting the learning of additional languages. In primary schools, an awareness component could precede or run alongside foreign-language learning.

■ *Encounter*

This approach introduces children to limited aspects of one, two or three other languages and cultures. It aims to encourage confidence, to awaken curiosity and to develop a very elementary competence in these languages, in order to prepare the ground for a rapid acceleration in the learning of one of them when pupils receive specialist teaching in the first year of secondary school. Over the course of (say) one year at primary school pupils might be exposed to three or four different languages, possibly covering essentially the same ground in each. It may therefore provide an experiential basis on which pupils may choose which language to learn at secondary school, if choice is made available to them.

An advantage of the 'encounter' approach is that it gives children experience of actually learning languages rather than simply learning about them. A possible problem with the 'awareness' approach is that it is likely to require pupils to spend much of their valuable time using their first language in order to discuss new linguistic and cultural concepts at an intellectually challenging level. If so, it is fair to ask whether it is more appropriate to do this rather than to spend more time in developing competence in the foreign language. The 'encounter' approach, on the other hand, probably strikes a better balance between learning languages and learning about them. Its clear disadvantage is that it offers insufficient time in which to make real progress in any one language.

■ *Subject-teaching*

Subject-teaching is the norm for UK secondary schools, usually implying the teaching of a foreign language as a subject within a curriculum otherwise taken in English, the first language of most if not all pupils. With this approach the foreign language is not used as a means of learning other subjects but is taught almost exclusively on the same drip-feed basis as other subjects, ie normally

from two to four class periods per week. It is assumed that the subject called French, German etc has its own distinctive aims, its own body of knowledge, its own processes of teaching and learning that mark it off from other subjects, and that it requires its own qualified and trained specialist teachers.

In some primary schools teachers have set out to teach a foreign language as though it were a secondary school subject but adapted for younger learners. This still happens today. However, the curriculum in Scottish primary schools is organised more holistically on the basis of five broad areas (language, environmental studies, mathematics, expressive arts, religious and moral education). This allows for a range of teaching and learning activities both within and across the five areas. The curriculum is not subject-based, and partly for this reason the *Guidelines for Teachers* in the national pilot projects in Scotland (SOED, 1992) do not envisage a foreign language as being taught in primary schools on the basis of importing the secondary school subject-teaching model. If it were presented as such, an additional objection would arise on the grounds that the primary school curriculum already has enough in it and cannot readily accommodate a distinctive, new, school subject.

■ *Embedding*

Embedding is the model that has generally been applied within the Scottish pilot projects. Rather than teach the foreign language as a separate course with its own defined syllabus and materials, attempts are made to relate it to other aspects of pupils' primary school curriculum, such as environmental studies, physical education and expressive arts. A class that is doing a project which cuts across these broad areas and entails (say) some history, geography, drama, science and art, might exploit an aspect of the project through activity in the foreign language. In this way children are encouraged to approach their learning holistically, rather than through sharply delineated bodies of subject knowledge. In many of the Scottish pilots, there has been strong support from a visiting foreign-language teacher from the associated secondary school working in collaboration with the primary-school classteacher. The embedding approach then is not subject-based but represents a small but significant step towards immersion.

■ *Advantages of the embedding model*

The embedding model offers certain advantages over the previous two models.

First, it allows pupils to relate the foreign language they are learning to the concepts about the world that they already possess or that they are learning at school. In other words, the foreign language can be mapped on to these existing concepts, thereby promoting a holistic approach to learning. It would be much more difficult for pupils if, in learning a foreign language, they were expected to do so in relation to concepts that were otherwise not dealt with at school and that were outwith their experience.

Second, it is a model that is well suited to the primary teacher who in principle is in a better position than (say) a visiting specialist from secondary to exploit the foreign language in respect of any area of the curriculum that seems appropriate at the time.

Third, the embedding model gives the primary teacher opportunities for enabling pupils to make connections between the language(s) they already possess (which in the UK in most cases will be English) and the foreign language they are learning. It will be argued in Chapter 3 that a sound competence in a child's first language, particularly in reading and writing, constitutes an essential basis for the development of higher-level skills in a foreign language.

Paradoxically, of the five major areas of the Scottish primary-school curriculum, the one that the Stirling evaluation team (Low, Duffield, Brown and Johnstone, 1993) found to be the least exploited through the foreign language was the Language area. There was, for example, relatively little evidence of discussion of grammatical structure or language function. With their enhanced role in the future, primary teachers ought to be in a good position to help pupils develop their awareness of Language through reflection on how their first and foreign languages are constituted and used.

■ *Problems with the embedding model*

However, there are a number of possible problems with the embedding model that do not yet appear to have been solved.

First, if embedding lends itself to implementation at primary, this is not the case at secondary where the model in many countries remains very much one of subject teaching. There is therefore a built-in discontinuity of basic approach between the two sectors which can pose particular problems for language teachers at secondary.

Second, the embedding model is almost by definition diffuse. It does not teach a pre-defined body of language containing a built-in progression of vocabulary, grammar and function—which is what the subject model does. There is a danger that it can lead to a rather fragmented approach—eg one week a bit of PE, next week a bit of environmental studies, the week after a bit of mathematics. This raises the problem as to how these various bits and pieces are to be made to hang together in one coherent system of language that pupils can understand and use. It therefore places heavy responsibility on both teachers and pupils to construct their own progression dynamically as particular areas of the curriculum are exploited.

Third, unlike the case of immersion, a body of research evidence does not exist on what the embedding model can reasonably be expected to deliver by the end of primary. The evaluation of the national pilots in Scotland has produced a first account of pupil attainment within the evaluation of the national pilot projects, but of course much of the teaching was undertaken by secondary teachers who in the future will play a less prominent role.

■ *Immersion*

Immersion is based on pupils taking a substantial part of their curriculum through the additional rather than the first language, with the classteacher being a native speaker of the language of instruction. The best known experiments on immersion have taken place in Canada, where the context tends to be one of second rather than foreign language learning, mainly with

English-speaking children learning French. There are various forms of immersion, for example early total, early partial, delayed total, delayed partial, late total and late partial. Much of the research in Canada has aimed to establish what the outcomes of these various forms of immersion are so that parents, teachers and others will have a well-informed idea of what may be expected.

A feature of French-immersion programmes in Canada is that they are optional: that is, parents decide whether or not to send their children to an immersion school. The teacher speaks French from the start but allows the pupils to speak English. They are not forced to speak French but voluntarily do so as from their second year. The intention is 'to produce much improved levels of French proficiency, without detriment to students' English language development, to their academic achievement in other subjects, or to their social-psychological well-being, and at the same time to develop positive attitudes and cultural sensitivity towards French-speaking Canadians.' (Harley, 1991).

By 1989/90 some 260,000 students were enrolled on immersion programmes throughout Canada. In a typical pattern of 'early total' immersion, according to Harley (1991), English-speaking children receive 100% of their teaching in French for the first few years at school, then English is gradually introduced around their third or fourth year, so that by age 10 or 11, half their education is in English and half in French. They are then offered a post-immersion follow-up programme at secondary school, including French language arts and one or two subjects each year in French. Immersion initiatives have also recently been reported elsewhere: in Australia (Clyne, 1991), Catalonia (Artigal, 1991) and Finland (Vesterbacka, 1991).

In Scotland, immersion programmes have, to some extent, been implemented in respect of Scottish Gaelic. The position is complicated, however, by the fact that while some children learning Gaelic come from homes in which the main or only language is English, in which case they may indeed be said to be in a Gaelic immersion class, other children in the same class come from homes where Gaelic is the main language, in which case it is probably more appropriate to talk of first language maintenance, as previously defined, rather than immersion. The one class, then, may be based on both second-language immersion and first language maintenance. Initially, particularly in the 1980s, the formula for teaching Gaelic was based on bilingual education, with some of the curriculum in Gaelic and other aspects in English, as in 'partial immersion'. In recent years, however, a more powerful form of Gaelic education has emerged through the Gaelic-Medium Units that form part of an increasing number of primary schools. Here, children whose parents so wish receive all of their curriculum through Gaelic, in the initial years at least, in ways akin to 'early total immersion'.

Scotland, then, has excellent experience of the embedding model through its foreign languages projects, and equally good experience of partial and total immersion and first language maintenance models in relation to Gaelic, though less so in respect of other minority languages. This mixture becomes even

richer when one bears in mind the other first language of Scotland, namely Scots (or Scots English). The potential over the next decade for enhancing children's education at primary school by embedding these first, second and foreign languages within one well-planned overall programme for language and learning is considerable.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE INITIATIVES IN SCOTLAND

Phase 1 of the national pilot scheme for foreign languages in Scottish primary schools was launched in the late autumn of 1989. It consisted of six secondary schools, each with a number of associated primary schools. Phase 2 was introduced in autumn 1990, consisting of an additional six secondaries and their associated primaries. In total, the national pilot projects involved 12 secondary schools and 76 primaries, covering four languages. Most projects were dedicated to French or German, but there was one for Italian and one for Spanish, a clear sign of Scotland's wish to diversify provision. In addition to the national pilot projects, there have been initiatives at local authority level, particularly the very large Strathclyde Region scheme which (in 1990/91) embraced 24 secondary and 133 primary schools, in addition to the three secondary and 13 primary schools that form part of the national pilot (Wilson, 1991) in that region.

Such was the impetus attained by the projects that the Secretary of State for Scotland announced in 1992 that in the course of the next five years a foreign language would be introduced into every primary school in Scotland. In the national pilot schools, a foreign language is now being introduced from Primary 6 onwards (pupils aged 10), except in two of the projects where it has been introduced as a one-off experiment from Primary 4 (age eight) onwards.

Until recently, the position in state schools in Scotland was that a foreign language was introduced in the first year of secondary education (pupils aged 12) and maintained as a compulsory subject for some two years only—a position that compared most unfavourably with other countries in Europe. However, major change is in hand—not only through the foreign language pilots in primary schools, but also in view of *Circular 1178* (SOED, 1989) which recommended that all pupils should maintain a foreign language for the first four years of secondary schooling. Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to envisage greatly increased numbers of learners in Scotland studying a foreign language for perhaps two years at primary school and then four or more years at secondary—a dramatic change from recent practice.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE INITIATIVES ELSEWHERE IN THE UK

Pupils attend primary school in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from age 5 to age 11. At the time of writing there are no official national or local projects on foreign languages in primary schools in Wales or Northern Ireland, so most pupils begin a foreign language there on entry to secondary school at age 11. In English state primary schools there is nothing comparable to the scale of experimentation in Scotland, though there are interesting local initiatives, for example in Kent and Hampshire. There is considerable interest among

headteachers and parents in England in the possibility of extending foreign languages to primary school, though for some time to come priority is likely to be given to supporting foreign languages in the National Curriculum, beginning with Key Stage 3 at secondary school.

It should be added that for many years a foreign language, usually French, has been taught in many independent primary schools throughout the United Kingdom, but these do not significantly affect the general picture.

THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS EARLY INTRODUCTION ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE

So far as the continent of Europe is concerned, the picture is constantly changing in view of the momentum that the movement towards early introduction of foreign languages has achieved. In most European countries (for example France, Germany, Italy, Spain) children enter primary school at age six, though at age four in the Netherlands and age seven in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Generally, they begin learning a foreign language when they are eight to 10 years old, though in some countries there are official national or local experiments with an earlier start (for example in Austria and parts of Germany at age six, and in Italy at age seven). If the introduction of foreign languages at primary school in Scotland becomes established generally at age 10, ie in Primary 6, Scotland will still be behind most other countries in Europe though the gap will have been narrowed.

The information that follows will help to clarify the position in other European countries. So far as is known, what is described pertains to combinations of four of the five models of teaching approach described earlier, the exception being 'immersion' which is discussed separately in a later chapter. The information is drawn from a variety of sources, including published articles and reports, information networks and databases such as Eurydice, phone-calls to foreign embassies and cultural agencies and contact with professionals in the field. The countries chosen are not intended as a comprehensive list, and the examples quoted are not intended as fully representative of the countries mentioned, because in a changing context information may quickly go out of date. More information is provided on France and Italy, in view of the major national initiatives in these countries and resemblances with what is happening in Scotland.

■ France

France has recently undertaken a major initiative on foreign languages at primary but national policy has fluctuated. A national project began in 1989, to be reported and evaluated over three years. The Ministry had wanted an uptake of 25% of pupils (aged 10) in CM2, final year primary school, by the end of the project's third year. In the event CM2 pupils reached 32% and CM1 pupils (aged nine) 15%, totalling 333,000 pupils from 8145 primary schools. In January 1993 a new national policy was announced running from primary to lycée, including professional education and teacher training. This looked for a gradual expansion of provision, particularly in final year primary, so that account could be taken in secondary of pupils' foreign language abilities.

In France, choice of language tends to be left to the wishes of parents and what the school can provide. This has resulted in English attaining a share at 78% and rising, with German at 17%. There has been considerable discussion about the aims of teaching a foreign language in primary school in France, with 'sensibilisation' (awareness) attracting some and 'apprentissage' (language learning) attracting others. Official policy came down in favour of language learning, with the primary period viewed as one of 'initiation' in learning a foreign language. Observations of the primary project led the inspectorate of schools to the view that the main benefits have been in positive attitudes and in aural comprehension. There were also official indications that the foreign language at primary should draw on other areas of the primary curriculum and not be regarded as divorced from the life of the school or the pupils.

The pilot project used secondary language teachers, primary teachers with language competence and 'intervenants extérieurs'. The latter were not part of the national education system and were employed and paid by the local municipality. They could be native speakers, or French persons with a good language competence, whether teachers or not. Policy moved towards using mainly primary school teachers and to devoting substantial resources to their training, with additional staff allocated to teacher-training institutes. Finance was allocated to support in-service courses offering language and pedagogic training, with a certificate at the end attesting the teacher's competence in the language and ability to teach it in primary schools. There are also in-service courses for first year secondary teachers to raise their awareness of what is going on at primary. Very recently national policy appears to have changed, in that it is now being left to each region of the country to decide for itself on the extent to which a foreign language should be taught at primary. This is seen by many as a clear step back from what appeared to have been a strong national commitment. The reason is not clear. Informal contact with colleagues from France suggests it may have partly to do with resource implications (eg finding and affording a sufficient number of appropriate teachers) and partly because of a view that in any case beginners at secondary are likely to have caught up by age 16.

■ *Italy*

A reform of primary schools in 1985 proposed the teaching of foreign languages from primary 3 (age eight), followed by further initiatives with a view to gradually extending provision in 1992/93. The regulations provide that the language taught should be English, French, German or Spanish and that each area of the country should guarantee an adequate representation of the four languages, though the demand for English by parents and pupils is well in advance of that for other languages. Teaching of the foreign language is obligatory from P3 but may begin at P2 (age seven) where circumstances permit. Teaching is to take place within the reformed primary curriculum which is organised in modes, with the foreign language being in the language mode, though there has been much discussion of how to relate it to the other modes too.

The national reforms (Boella-Ruggiero, 1992) envisage a move from the concept of one primary teacher who covers all aspects of the curriculum with their class, towards an arrangement in which there are three teachers for every two classes, allowing for some degree of specialisation. Other evidence indicates a national strategy for teacher-training was developed for implementation as from 1992/93. It is based partly on *recruitment*, with qualified primary teachers taking a special test to demonstrate their existing foreign-language competence, and partly on the *training* of primary teachers with low levels of foreign-language competence who receive some 450 hours of language-training and 50 hours of methodology, in addition to doing their job of teaching (22 hours per week)—much more than what is provided in Scotland.

There is also a difficulty of ensuring continuity of the same language from primary to secondary, but for the past four years there has been a project involving some 2000 'scuole medie' (the three-year middle school that follows on from the four-year primary) in which two foreign languages have been taught to pupils and in which the foreign languages teachers have been working with teachers of the children's first language (Italian) in harmonising aims and methods. A proposal for extending the project was put to parliament which, when enacted, will help resolve the difficulties of diversification and continuity.

The aims are clearly for the development of language competence linked with the wider intercultural and human enrichment aims of the primary school. The strategy is to have a continuum of language learning from primary through to university. The primary period, though aiming towards competence, is (like France) normally seen as an initiation and is not formal (but not informal). At secondary level there has not yet been a commensurate reform of syllabuses and methods and hence continuity from primary through secondary may be problematical.

■ Spain

Until recently one school covered the whole compulsory school stage, from age six to 14, with a foreign language compulsory from age 11 onwards. The dominant foreign language has been French but in the 1970s and 1980s there has been a strong swing to English. A new reformed system is being phased in, raising the school leaving age to 16. Secondary schools now cover ages 11 to 16, and primaries cover six to 10. As from session 1993/94 a foreign language is intended to cover the final three years of primary, ages eight to 10. Three hours per week will be devoted to the foreign language, possibly somewhat less in the autonomous regions, to make room for the indigenous language (Basque, Catalan, Galician) as well as Spanish. Class teachers will cover the whole curriculum, with the exception of music, PE and the foreign language which will be taught by specialist teachers who are also certificated generalist teachers.

There are various experimental schemes. In Catalonia, for example, (Santos, 1991) the selection of 12 pilot schools was based on competitive proposals from schools for authorisation to participate in the scheme. Here, the situation is trilingual, involving Catalan and Spanish, with French being

introduced through the pilots from age eight. The approach is integrative, based mainly on exploitation of 'les Arts plastiques' (practical arts), with some additional support from physical education and dance, since all three of these aspects of the primary school curriculum involve various kinds of psychomotor activity and relatively little use of first language. Artefacts of various sorts (eg houses, dolls) are made with modelling paste, cardboard etc, and more recently computers have been introduced, enabling children to devise elements such as their own farm with animals, or a real or imaginary village.

■ *Germany*

In Germany the foreign language is mainly English, beginning at 10, but there are pilot schemes in some federal states based on an earlier introduction. In Lower-Saxony for example (Bliesener, 1993) the starting-age is eight, pupils having two hours per week, distributed flexibly within an approach that integrates the foreign language into the overall curriculum. The aim is to allow children's concepts developed through their first language to be further developed in relation to the foreign language and its associated cultures, and thereby to combine the benefits of 'awareness' and 'embedding' rather than perceive these as opposed to each other. The main language modes are listening and speaking, with reading and writing in support. There is no formal assessment of foreign-language skills at primary, so competence in this area is not used in determining the type of school children will subsequently attend.

Colleagues in Germany report that there can be a difference between foreign-language learning in areas that border on another country and those that do not. In the state of Baden-Württemberg French is being introduced (at eight or nine) because of geographical proximity to Alsace-Lorraine, with English as third language from age 10; and there is a similar project on the introduction of Italian in Bavaria. The Baden-Württemberg scheme, based on "Apprends la langue de ton voisin", occupies three hours per week of additional, voluntary school-time. By 1990, some 30,000 pupils from age eight onwards were involved, as contacts of different sorts were developed with schools and communities in neighbouring Alsace-Lorraine.

The embedding approach adopted in primary schools can be seen as a natural and logical lead-in to the increasing amount of content-based instruction in German secondary schools, ie using a foreign language to teach another subject in whole or in part. There is a similar increase of content-based foreign language instruction in France.

■ *The Netherlands*

Since 1986 English as a foreign language has been compulsory in Dutch primary education. It was preceded by two decades of preparation, especially in relation to curriculum development and in-service training. As a result, a wide range of adequate teaching material is in use and nationwide 14,000 primary teachers have followed a multi-media training course. Recent research shows that in 1993 English was fully established in the curriculum of primary schools. Almost every primary school begins teaching English at the age of 10.

Generally, the teaching is undertaken by primary class teachers. The National Institute for Curriculum Development has drawn up clear core objectives which are widely accepted. They are highly specific about the skills for speaking, listening and reading to be attained. In 1991 the first national assessment of English at the end of primary education was undertaken. Despite the fact that much remains to be done, Edelenbos and Koster (1993) claim that foreign language teaching in Dutch primary schools in the Netherlands looks promising. Particular progress has been made in listening and reading, and the main problem seems to be continuity into secondary education (Edelenbos, 1993).

■ *Luxembourg*

Luxembourg is clearly a special socio-linguistic case on account of its geographical location and political role within Europe. Pupils receive their elementary school education in Letzeburgish, the national language that is generally spoken at home. At primary school (age 6) they also begin German as the second language, which becomes the teaching language for practically all subjects in primary school. French as a third language is introduced towards the middle of the second year of primary school, while Lezteburgish continues to be used in parallel with German and French. At secondary school pupils have a choice between a classical education (including Latin) and a modern education (including English) consisting of a French-medium track and a German-medium track which merge into a French-medium track from fourth year secondary onwards. If they choose the classical route, they begin English in the second year of secondary education, in which case their education will include Letzeburgish, German, French, English and Latin. According to Wagner (1992) pupils coming through the system reach a competence in German and French sufficient for oral communication on everyday topics, but there are reservations concerning general competence in written language, and it cannot be claimed that everybody speaking French or German is necessarily able to think in that language. This offers a suitable note of caution concerning what might be possible in Scotland, given the linguistically much more advantageous situation in which Luxembourg finds itself.

■ *Other European countries*

In Sweden, English is introduced as a compulsory language for 100% of the age-group concerned from the age of nine or 10. The government is in favour of making an earlier start, and discussions are taking place on making a second foreign language obligatory. At present this is taken for six years by 63% of pupils from the age of 13 (German 50%, French 12% and Spanish 1%). Finland introduces a first foreign language from eight and a second from 11. Despite proximity to Russia, the range now normally consists of English, German and Swedish.

In Greece, pupils learn a foreign language (mainly English) in the final three years of primary school. Those teaching English at that level are required by presidential decree to have a degree in English philology from a Greek university or a degree from a foreign establishment of equal rank.

Recent political developments in Central Europe have led to major change in language provision. In the Czech Republic, for example, the first foreign language used to be Russian but this has now been replaced by English or German. It is introduced at the age of nine, but in the large cities there are primary schools (ten of them in Prague) where it is introduced at eight, with a second foreign language at 12.

Ever since the late 1940s there has been interest in Croatia in the learning of foreign languages by children, with English and other languages taking over from Russian after the split in 1949 between former Yugoslavia and former USSR. In 1973 a pilot project was introduced for 9-year-olds. More recently, in the Autumn of 1991 a new pilot scheme was introduced in 12 primary schools in Zagreb covering children in the first grade, aged six, with English, French or German as the foreign language, and with another cohort beginning with Italian at age eight. In session 1992/93 another 22 schools were added, some in other parts of the country. The classes are generally taught by secondary school teachers with a university language degree and additional training for working with young children (Vilke, 1993). As in the Scottish pilots, they work closely with the classteachers who in most cases also have some command of the language being taught. Each class is split into two groups of 12–15 and they receive five 1-hour periods per week in the foreign language. The pilot scheme is being closely monitored by a team of researchers at the University of Zagreb whose published work (Vilke, 1993; Digunovic, 1993; Kovacevic, 1993; Vrhovac, 1993) on attitude, acquisition, discourse and attainment is of international relevance.

I visited Croatia in Spring 1994 to see the pilot scheme at first hand. There was very clear evidence of progression from beginners aged six to more intermediate learners aged eight, with no sign of let up. What was of particular interest was that the eight-year-olds were able to handle common grammatical terminology in the foreign language without any sign of incomprehension. For example, they could come to the board in order to point out nouns, verbs, adjectives etc in a story text—all in French. The teachers were quite clear that they were using terminology in the foreign language with which they knew the children were already familiar in their first language (Croatian) from their first two years at primary school.

■ *Examples from outside Europe*

Finally, the two examples from other parts of the world which follow, while not representative of foreign language provision, reveal interesting features. In Louisiana (USA), the teaching of French to young children is justified (Tamuly, 1991) by a wish of the community to preserve and revive their linguistic heritage in which French plays an important part. The intention is that young children in families that over the generations have become English-speaking, should learn to communicate with their French-speaking grandparents. The programme introduces a rich variety of 'heritage activities', not so much so that children should be exposed at school to separate packages of heritage culture—culture capsules (Taylor and Sorenson, 1961)—but rather

that the heritage culture should permeate their curriculum as a kind of 'imprégnation culturelle' (Tamuly, 1991) involving local history, theatre, games, traditional song and dance, puppets and other such activities designed to stimulate children's imagination and intellectual curiosity.

There is a small-scale experiment in offering French on an optional basis in Porto Alegre, capital of the southern-most state of Brazil. The schools are all in an area of severe social disadvantage and the programme begins at the age of eight, immediately after pupils have begun to master reading and writing in their first language. French is intentionally presented not in terms of everyday reality but as an 'univers magique' characterised by fun, imagination, play, dance, songs, stories and walks, in contrast to the everyday universe of adults, marked by violence and enforced work, to which in their everyday lives pupils are often prematurely exposed (Botella *et al*, 1991).

DISCUSSION

■ Diversity and commonality of aims in teaching languages

This overview of foreign and second-language teaching in primary schools in several countries makes it clear that the process can serve very different aims. Among the diversity of aims, stated from the perspective of children as learners, are:

- to establish a basic competence in another language
- to develop the skill of listening
- to develop the skills of listening and speaking
- to develop the skills of listening and reading
- to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing
- to make an initial encounter with one or more other languages
- to learn other subject-matter through the medium of the other language
- to increase one's repertoire of possibilities for study and work abroad when older
- to become a more flexible and outward-looking person
- to learn about other cultures
- to learn about the nature, structure, workings and uses of language
- to recapture a receding heritage
- to make contact with young neighbours across the frontier
- to create a more international identity
- to perceive a richer view of life in compensation for social disadvantage.

At the same time, there is an underlying common theme of enabling children to enrichen and broaden their education during a vital formative period of their schooling—more specifically, to enhance their cognitive, affective, psychomotor and imaginative capacities. Among the activities that are commonly engaged in are: play, theatre, dance, song, puppetry, art, information-gathering, story-telling, poetry, craft, design, letter-writing and model-making.

■ Underlying problems in extending provision

However, behind such activity lie certain problems that have to do with resources, time and starting age.

■ Resources

It is clear that the five models of teaching approach discussed at the beginning of this chapter differ greatly in their implications for resources, particularly staffing. However attractive 'immersion' may be, it normally requires teachers who are native speakers of the language of instruction. As such, it will not be feasible for large-scale introduction in a country such as Scotland. Even the 'embedding' and 'subject-teaching' models place high demands on the language competence of those teaching a foreign language in primary schools. Questions then arise as to whether an adequate supply of such teachers can be found and how they may be further trained in methodology, assessment and other relevant matters.

■ Time

The development of a general, all-round foreign language proficiency in school, by whatever approach, takes considerable time and effort. Under current circumstances a pupil beginning in a Scottish secondary school would have around two hours of classroom contact per week for forty weeks for four years, ie 320 hours, leading up to the first major national examination, Standard Grade, at age 16. The addition of two hours per week for (say) two years in primary school would give an overall total of 480 hours of contact over six years from age 10 to age 16. This total is, if anything, optimistic.

It should also be borne in mind that in Scotland, as opposed to some of the other countries discussed, there is even today relatively little informal exposure to a foreign language outside school, to complement what the school provides. The media in which children are interested, such as pop-songs, magazines, television, are rarely presented in French, German, Spanish or any language other than English.

It is not clear how many hours of interaction with another language are required before proficiency is attained. To some extent, of course, it depends on one's definition of proficiency, a matter discussed in Chapter 3. It also depends on many other factors (for example aptitude, quality of teaching, resources, support, opportunity, attitude and motivation) but it is probable that even if all of these additional factors were favourable (that is, pupils of high aptitude with a good teacher etc), considerably more than the 320 hours at secondary school would be required before any learner at school crossed the threshold into a stable, all-round practical command of the language. Additional hours gained in primary school will help considerably, but a total of over 1000 hours has been estimated (cf Vilke, 1988) as being required. It is reasonable to assume that the more time that is spent learning and using the language, the better the chance the learner has of becoming proficient.

However, how should this time be distributed? Is it better, for example, to begin early and maintain a language over several years, or to begin later and to spend the same amount of time in learning more intensively?

■ Starting-age

This takes us to the question of starting age. Does the age at which pupils begin learning another language in school make a significant difference? The earlier

the start, the greater the amount of time available (perhaps), but are (say) 8-year-olds more pre-disposed to foreign language learning than (say) 12-year-olds or adolescents or adults? Or is it the case that each age brings certain advantages and disadvantages? If so, in what ways might such advantages as accompany particular ages be exploited in school or other educational settings? These questions cannot be answered without reference to research on language acquisition and learning, as set out in the next chapter.

3
LEARNING ANOTHER LANGUAGE

It is only recently that teachers have paid substantial attention to how their pupils learn (or acquire) a foreign language. In the past, they have been more concerned with what they, as teachers, need to do in order to teach it. In initial teacher training too, 'methods' components have been concerned far more with methods of teaching, than of learning. In the past 50 years the two dominant methods of foreign language teaching have been grammar-translation, in which the teacher teaches rules of written grammar, vocabulary, translation and literature; and audio-lingual, in which the teacher gives much more emphasis to drilling pupils in key patterns of spoken language (using flashcards and language laboratories in the process).

Insofar as assumptions are made within these teaching approaches as to how pupils learn a foreign language, grammar-translation may be said to reflect a cognitive, analytical, rule-learning approach, and audio-lingual to reflect a behavioural, stimulus/response, habit-formation approach. Neither of these views comes near to explaining how learners develop an ability to communicate through the use of a foreign language. Since the late 1970s enormous effort has been dedicated to developing a more communicative approach in schools. Here the foreign language is to be used creatively for real communication, not just for drilling or translation. We all know that to use a language creatively, we must be able to operate a system of underlying rules, otherwise we would be parrots.

This chapter considers a number of concepts that researchers have studied in relation to the learning and use of another language. On the whole, this refers to learning a foreign language but where it is clearly a case of learning a second language, this is highlighted. We look first at what using languages for real communication means, and then turn to the system of rules and strategies that underlies real language use.

USING LANGUAGE FOR REAL COMMUNICATION

It is widely agreed that one of the main purposes in learning a foreign language is to be able to use it for real communication. What does this mean?

■ *Information-exchange*

For one thing, it implies a genuine exchange of information. The information that is exchanged could be of many different sorts, for example statements of fact, feelings, wishes, hopes, commands, opinions. The meanings expressed could be of an everyday, fairly superficial variety, or they could be more latent, implied, less easy to fathom. Let us consider an example that does *not* meet the criterion of information-exchange, even of the simple, on-the-surface variety. If a teacher knows what the time is but asks a pupil "Quelle heure est-il" and the pupil gives the correct time in French, this is not real communication—because the teacher already knows the time. The purpose underlying the teacher's question was probably to ascertain whether or not the pupil could

tell the time in French, rather than to learn what the time was, so the language is 'for practice' rather than 'for real'. Evidence from a detailed observational study of first and second-year classes at secondary school in Scotland (Mitchell, Parkinson and Johnstone, 1981) confirms strongly how prevalent 'practice' language was even in the late 1970s, with 'real' communication figuring in less than 2% of activities. Since then, there has undoubtedly been a build-up of 'language for real', and the evaluation study by Low, Duffield, Brown and Johnstone (1993) revealed that in the Scottish primary-school pilots, the percentage had gone up to some 40%.

There are two other main implications of using language 'for real', that follow on from what has been said above.

- ***Selecting for oneself what meanings to express***

If they are to be able to communicate in a foreign language, pupils must learn to choose for themselves what to say or write. (This is of course not necessary when they are simply practising vocabulary or patterns of grammar). This implies that a resource has to be built up, from which to select, and that this should contain an internalised set of principles that enable an appropriate selection to be made. Until the advent of communicative teaching, the vast majority of exercises in foreign language course-books did not give pupils much opportunity to choose for themselves what to say. Instead, course-book exercises informed pupils of the meanings they were to express and it then became the teacher's task to check on whether or not the pupils could in fact express these meanings in the foreign language.

- ***Coping with the unpredictable***

For another, they must learn to cope with the unpredictable. If Pupil A is able to select for himself or herself what to say to Pupil B, then Pupil B will not know exactly in advance what Pupil A is going to say. Pupil B therefore must be able to cope with this unpredictability at two levels: first in understanding that which has been said or written but that could not be exactly predicted, and second in immediately, and without preparation, selecting in turn from his or her own resource something appropriate to say in response. This of course applies to communication in any language, including our first language. It is particularly important in foreign languages, however, precisely because the person a learner is speaking to is often likely to have a much more fully developed command of the language, (such as a teacher or a native speaker). It can be very difficult to predict what a native speaker of a language will say, even in response to a simple question. From the pupil's point of view, then, there is a much greater premium on 'coping with the unpredictable' in a foreign language than in the first language. Pupils therefore need to be able to cope with a flow of language, not all of which they can be expected to understand, to feel reasonably comfortable with this and to be encouraged to develop strategies that allow them to infer or guess at the meanings that they do not already know.

A DYNAMIC SYSTEM OF RULES AND STRATEGIES

In order to make a foreign language work 'for real' then, it is not simply a question of learning lists of vocabulary (nouns, adjectives, adverbs...) or lists

of grammar structures (tenses, adjective endings, plurals, cases, genders…) or lists of language functions (how to offer, to refuse, to request, to thank, to complain to praise… in the foreign language). Nor is it simply a question of learning and practising ready-made conversations or re-telling ready-made stories. All of these activities may have a part to play, but they are not nearly enough. If a language is to be used 'for real', then it must be taught as a dynamic system, one that for example enables learners to create language rather than reproduce it. Within this system, prominence will be given to abilities such as 'selecting for oneself what to say or write', 'selecting how to express this in the foreign language', 'making guesses or inferences, in order to cope with meanings that could not be exactly predicted in advance'.

The message of this chapter may be encapsulated by the following questions, each of which is highlighted by one or two keywords:

- ***What does the system consist of?***
  Keyword: *Communicative Competence*
- ***How is the system internalised within the learner?***
  Keywords: *Acquisition and Learning*
- ***How does the system develop over time and what does it lead to?***
  Keywords: *Progression and Proficiency.*

Each of these aspects is discussed in turn.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The term communicative competence describes the system of rules and strategies that learners must be able to operate if they are to use a language for real communication. The Canadian researcher Canale (1983) has identified four components of communicative competence:

- ***Grammatical competence***

knowledge of vocabulary (for example, different categories of words, different meanings associated with particular words), of sound (for example, the pronunciation of individual sounds and patterns of intonation) and of grammar (for example, the structure of phrases and sentences, adjective agreements, tense formation…)

- ***Sociolinguistic competence***

knowledge of how to use language appropriately in different types of context. For example: selecting something appropriate to say (Is it appropriate for me to accept? refuse? thank? complain? suggest? mention…?). Finding an appropriate way of saying it. (Exactly how am I to express my thanks? my acceptance? my refusal? my complaint? …Am I to do so formally or casually? politely or less politely?)

- ***Discourse competence***

linking elements together to give recognisable shape to categories of discourse such as conversations, stories, reports, discussions, debates, explanations… This implies, for example, knowing how to begin, develop and close a conversation or other category of discourse such as those mentioned above; how to refer back to something previously mentioned, how to change the

topic, how to link elements together by means of connectors, how to take turns in a conversation or discussion, how to intervene...

■ ***Strategic competence***
knowledge of appropriate communication strategies, in order to cope and effect repair when communication breaks down, as it often does when using a foreign language (for example, asking for clarification, asking for repetition, coining a word in the foreign language even if you don't know that it exists, checking that you are understood); knowledge of appropriate strategies for effective language learning and language use (see page 31 for section on metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective strategies).

To the list above several writers have recently added a fifth component of communicative competence:

■ ***Cultural competence***
for example knowledge of and sensitivity towards attitudes, norms of behaviour in the cultures and sub-cultures in which the other language is spoken; and capacity to learn and absorb more about those cultures and sub-cultures through use of the language.

From this, it becomes immediately evident that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, though important, are not enough. If learners are to engage in successful communication, the sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and cultural aspects must also be catered for. It also becomes evident that the task falls beyond the scope of the foreign-language teacher, particularly in the limited time available in schools. The only means of developing these competences is through a whole-school approach to language and learning, with foreign languages making their contribution to but also benefiting from the general strategy. As part of an overall policy on language and learning, the primary school class teacher might seek to develop these five aspects of communicative competence with pupils in their first language, with the consequence that at a later stage they might be explicitly related to foreign or second languages, whether in primary or secondary schools.

ACQUISITION AND LEARNING

What can learners do in order to internalise the system of rules and strategies governing communicative competence, to the point that they can operate this system spontaneously and without too much difficulty? It is evident that the rules and strategies for the different components of communicative competence are of very different sorts. Rules for grammatical competence, for example, such as sentence-structure and word-endings, are not the same as rules for discourse competence, such as turn-taking in conversations or using connectors to link phrases together. Accordingly, it is unlikely that one single process of internalisation will cover all components of this complex rule system.

So far as grammatical competence is concerned, there have been two main views on this: one assuming that the most important rules are best acquired

through natural use of the language, and the other, while acknowledging the importance of natural processes, attaching importance also to more formal processes of learning.

Natural acquisition

The most influential figure to support the 'natural acquisition' view has been Krashen in a series of publications (for example Krashen, 1981). Key points in the natural approach follow.

'No interface' between acquisition and learning

Krashen argues that there are two different processes (natural acquisition and conscious learning) but his 'no interface' argument states that they have no connection with each other, ie naturally acquired rules and consciously learnt rules do not connect together to form one system of rules. He claims that the underlying system of rules that enables us to use language spontaneously is formed by natural acquisition and not by conscious learning. Conscious learning of rules does have a role in helping us to 'monitor' the language that we and others produce, for example to judge if it is grammatically correct or socially appropriate, but this learnt system of rules is of no use in spontaneous communication, where only the naturally acquired system operates. On this argument, it follows that teachers should devote more time in classrooms to acquisition than to formal learning. How then does acquisition take place?

Affective filter

Krashen has several points to make, of which two should be mentioned here. First all learners possess an 'affective filter' that can prevent them from acquiring language. This filter is activated when we become apprehensive, for example when students are afraid to take risks with language, lest they make grammatical mistakes or their shortcomings in vocabulary be found out. If they are to become successful acquirers, then the affective filter must be de-activated. They must be encouraged to relax, to build up their confidence, to take risks, otherwise their tensions and anxieties will put up a filter that prevents them from absorbing language by natural means.

Focus on meanings rather than forms

Secondly, they must be 'focused on meaning' rather than on grammatical form. It becomes the teacher's job to talk with the class at a level somewhat above their existing comprehension threshold (what Krashen terms 'input + 1') and to accompany this with non-verbal aspects of communication such as mime, gesture, visuals, actions, intonation. If students are focused on meaning, in other words striving to comprehend what the teacher is saying, then their inborn natural acquisition capacity will take care of the system of rules that underlies the meanings on which they are focused. Put simply, by engaging in real communication they will automatically pick up the language without having to spend much time formally learning rules of grammar.

LAD and universal grammar

An assumption lying behind the view described above is that all human beings are born with a special capacity for language, what Lenneberg (1967) has called

our 'language acquisition device' or LAD. This is held to contain what linguists call 'universal grammar', a deep and highly abstract system of rules that underlie all human languages. Exposure to one particular language and attempts to understand (focus on meanings) will activate the language acquisition device and enable children to acquire the rules governing that particular language. This theory helps explain the way in which children acquire a highly creative system of rules for their first language before they go to primary school, because clearly they cannot possibly have learnt them consciously. Similarly, it can help explain, in part at least, how additional languages are acquired.

■ *Children's capacity for natural acquisition*

In some important respects children appear to have advantages over adults, for example in 'acquiring' the sound system of a foreign language. It is widely held (for example Cohen, 1991) that an early beginning is necessary if a native-speaker-like accent is to be acquired. A similar view in favour of young children is expressed by Guberina (1991) who claims that children's capacity for acquiring a second language diminishes from the age of seven in proportion as their intellectual, affective and psychomotor skills develop. Penfield and Roberts (1959) argue that a young child's brain is uniquely well adapted for language learning, and that there is a critical period, the first decade of life, during which '... multiple languages may be learned perfectly, with little effort' and after which attempts to learn other languages would meet only moderate success.

Much of the evidence favouring younger as opposed to older learners derives from naturalistic second-language settings, in which children pick up (or acquire) languages informally. In his wide-ranging account of age and foreign-language learning, Singleton (1989) quotes Tomb's (1925) study of the intuitive capacity of young children to understand spoken languages, in which he writes of English children aged three or four years in Bengal conversing freely with their parents in English, with their nurses in Bengali, with the garden coolies in Santali and with the servants in Hindustani, while their parents struggled to utter a few simple phrases in these other languages.

■ *Adult problems in natural acquisition*

Some writers have hypothesised an inverse relationship between age and ease of foreign language acquisition. They argue that as our cognitive problem-solving capacities develop with age, so do they get in the way of the natural acquisition process. It has been assumed that if children begin a foreign or second language at a young enough age, they will acquire it in much the same way as their first language. The onset of adolescence has been hypothesised as being the phase at which our capacity for natural, intuitive acquisition begins to atrophy (Bley-Vroman, 1989), with the consequence that adults are not able to acquire language in the same way as or as well as children. Although adults' more consciously learnt rules and strategies may enable them to build up a wide vocabulary, develop an explicit knowledge of grammar that will be useful in reading and writing, and negotiate their way through events, they are not

likely to attain the almost native-speaker levels of pronunciation, intonation and intuitive knowledge of structure that children are able to acquire and that are essential for spontaneous communication. Lamendella (1977) has suggested that adults may at times operate a 'current best shot' principle, making use of their highest level of problem-solving strategy in areas where less cognitive, more intuitive approaches would in fact be more appropriate. In other words, adults are prone to over-complicate things.

■ *Children 'at one' with events*

My impressions of children in primary-school classrooms suggest strongly that young children do have a capacity to become 'at one' with events in ways that many adults, with their greater degree of detachment, find difficult. At times children appear (some of them, at any rate) to throw themselves so enthusiastically and unproblematically into events that they may not even be sure which language is being used. This may pose problems as to how they are to negotiate their way through the particular event, but it probably does help them to absorb the language that is part of the event. Adults, on the other hand, are more able to look upon events from the outside. In consequence, they may see their role as being more problematical and may be more prone to worry (activating the 'affective filter'?) and to over-complicate things ('current best shot'?). Perhaps children's capacity to solve Rubic cube-type puzzles (or to manipulate gadgets in order to programme video-recorders at a distance!) much more quickly than most adults is a reflection of the same intuitive sense that they have for language acquisition.

■ *Errors*

In support of the acquisition view, one can reasonably state that far too much attention was paid in the past to the drilling and practice of grammar. There is indeed some research evidence based on Scottish classrooms (Weinert, 1987) to support the anecdotal experience of many teachers that pupils may consciously practise a grammar rule, and get it 'right' in exercises designed to check on it but get it 'wrong' when engaging in spontaneous communication. Indeed, they may still be getting it wrong some years after having consciously learnt it and got it right in practice. Despairing teachers of fifth-form Highers classes are wont to think to themselves, 'They learnt this structure two years ago and are still getting it wrong!' Here pupils may have learnt the rule, but not yet acquired it in the deeper and more important sense. What this may mean, is that the order in which rules are acquired is not necessarily dictated by the conscious learning process but is also influenced by the workings of an innate mechanism for language acquisition (our LAD), something we may not be able to control consciously. Several writers have argued, for example, that instruction does not prevent 'natural' errors from occurring.

■ *Learning (and Acquisition)*

Most researchers do not claim that natural acquisition alone can account for the development of foreign or second language competence. They allow a role for explicit knowledge about language, including its grammar, in order to promote accuracy as well as fluency. Recent research on grammar suggests a

possibly new emphasis for grammatical knowledge. Ellis (1993) for example argues that in the recent past the teaching of grammar has been too much directed at developing skills in spoken language production. He suggests instead that teaching explicit knowledge of grammar may initially be more useful in helping learners to improve their comprehension skills. It is perfectly possible for learners of any age to use their commonsense knowledge in order to extract the gist of a speaker's remarks, for example by paying attention to their facial expression, their gestures, their intonation. This is fine, but only up to a point. For more precise comprehension, it is essential to have an explicit understanding of grammatical forms, for example to know whether a speaker is referring to a past, present, future or hypothetical event (therefore grammar of tense and time), or is talking about one object or several (therefore grammar of singular and plural).

Faerch and Kasper (1983) have suggested that acquisition and learning can indeed be connected into the one system of rules. This, they suggest, occurs as a result of two complementary processes, consciousness-raising and automatisation. Consciousness-raising involves reflection by learners (often with the assistance of their teachers) on such rules as they may have acquired unconsciously and that appear in their spontaneous output. This reflection enables learners to gain more conscious control, for example enabling them to monitor correctness or appropriateness. Automatisation involves learning unacquired rules consciously, practising and using them slowly at first, then gradually speeding up the process until their use has become automatic, in the same way as we learn to drive a car. On the model of Faerch and Kasper, the twin processes of automatisation and consciousness-raising work together: consciously learnt rules are automatised to become unconscious, and unconsciously acquired rules are raised to a conscious level. Whether a rule then initially comes into the system by conscious or unconscious means, it will be subjected to cycles of automatisation and consciousness-raising as its complexity, accuracy and range of operation increases.

To allow an important role for conscious learning of grammar in the process of internalising grammar rules is not, however, to deny the importance of the natural approach. In her review of recent immersion research, Collier (1992) quotes a well-known researcher Craig Chaudron who argues, 'There is little doubt that most language syllabi and instructional practices present structures that are inappropriate for learners' stage of acquisition or natural-universal sequences in development of specific language forms'. Collier herself adds that, in other words, 'the natural order of acquisition is a stronger force than textbook writers' and teachers' views of simple to complex and other attempts at logical sequencing ... Both first and second language acquisition research of the last 20 years has provided extensive evidence that for children, adolescents, and adults, language is acquired through a developmental process that focuses first on language use through meaningful communicative activities in the language, combined with steps along the way that sometimes involve a focus on language form with conscious self-editing and refinement of rules of the language'.

Evidence in support of formal learning

Formal learning, it has then been argued, does have some part to play in the internalisation of grammar rules. Several researchers have recently provided empirical evidence in support of this, for example White, Spada, Lightbown and Ranta (1991), White (1991), Doughty (1991), Tomasello and Heron (1991) and Krashen's former collaborator Terrell (1991). In short, they claim that a strategy in which pupils are involved for the most part in attempting to comprehend and express meanings, as in natural acquisition, but intersperse this with brief periods of instruction in which they learn and practise rules of grammar, produces better results than one based on natural acquisition alone.

Knowledge of grammar at primary school

It makes sense then to exploit the intuitive capacities of children and also to sow the seeds of grammatical knowledge. But when and how? Should the primary school phase be devoted entirely to natural processes, with FL grammar introduced at secondary? Or, should there be some FL grammar in the final year of primary? Or, should it be introduced from an earlier point? I favour the latter approach but in a carefully phased sequence, covering both L1 and FL, that does not impede the natural, intuitive processes that are important for all young learners. As such, the following sequence for the development of grammatical knowledge may be worthy of exploration:

1 Recognition of grammar in L1 texts, spoken and written eg nouns, verbs, adjectives, connectors, pronouns...
2 Recognition of same in FL texts, of Croatia, p17
3 Recognition of key grammatical differences between L1 and FL
4 Ability to state simple rules and to use this knowledge for comprehension (listening and reading), cf Ellis, p28
5 Ability to use rules in order to monitor and regulate own spoken and written output.

Using the right and left sides of the brain

In recent years there has been considerable interest in 'alternative' approaches to foreign-language learning, based on assumptions about how the brain functions. Rose (1985), for example, claims that conventional approaches have mainly made use of the left brain which deals with analysis, logic and words. He advocates a more integrated approach in which the left brain is harmonised with the right brain, largely disregarded in conventional approaches, which deals with overall patterns and images and which activates the more intuitive side of our personality. The two parts can be synchronised by means of relaxation techniques, including deep breathing, and by exposure to classical / baroque music. This applies particularly to the music of Johnann Sebastian Bach which appeals to both sides of the brain through its perfect harmonisation of logic (left side) and emotion (right side).

The holistic approach is characterised by richness of presentation, by encouragement of learners to engage themselves emotionally in activities, to perform physical actions, to develop techniques for building up a powerful

visual memory and to feel secure enough to make mistakes. By engaging the whole brain, with the two very different hemispheres working in unison, the approach is claimed to allow learners to assimilate very much higher levels of vocabulary and structure than is possible in conventional approaches. There is no doubt that language that is associated with sound, music, movement, colour, drama, and thereby impregnated with meaning, can indeed be assimilated in large chunks. Once this information has been taken in mainly by the right brain, it can gradually be processed further by the left brain, for example by means of consciousness-raising and automatisation as already described.

The approach has been devised mainly for adults, and the emphasis on a stress-free environment holds promise for enabling them to set aside their anxieties and inhibitions (lowering the affective filter), to project themselves more positively into events in the way that children do, and to make them more permeable to foreign-language input. It raises the possibility that adults may be able to acquire language intuitively in the way that some theorists considered they had left behind after puberty. Aspects of the holistic approach are already being applied in primary schools—for example songs, poems, rhymes, visual stories, vivid wall-displays, activities involving lots of physical action, bright pictorial vocabulary, colour-coding of key structures and games. The holistic approach holds particular promise for learners with special educational needs (SEN). At present, such pupils are often unable to cope with the national Standard grade examinations at age 16 which largely retain a conventional, sedentary, monochrome, exam-based format and are based on tourist and other simulations rather than on activity that invokes psychomotor as well as affective and cognitive abilities.

Looking to the future, it seems likely that information technology will facilitate both left- and right-brain activity. It will prove very useful, for example, to have foreign-language programmes in the idiom of children's TV—colour, sound-effects, music, images, animation, action, personality, games, dramatic story-lines and fun— in order to create a stress-free environment in which children in their homes will be exposed to substantial amounts of foreign language input, much more than that normally experienced in school.

■ *Learning to learn and learning to acquire*

Much of the debate concerning the relative roles of 'acquisition' and 'learning' has been in terms of pupils' control of grammar. I have suggested that both processes are important and that they can be connected. However, the term 'learning' has recently been used in the wider, and in some ways more important, sense of 'learning to learn' (and also, we might say, 'learning to acquire'), deriving from more general findings in educational psychology.

In their review of learning strategies Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) suggest that many children, '...can perform a strategy when asked or directed, but will act as if they do not possess this knowledge when given a task or problem'. They refer to Brown (1977) who argues in similar vein that, 'young children can do much more than they will do', and to Flavell (1981) who argues that, 'the sophisticated learner changes his cognitive actions according to his

understanding of cognitive goals: the young child learns this flexibility only very slowly'. Sophisticated older learners then have learnt how to learn—they focus on cognitive goals and draw on strategies that will enable them to achieve these goals.

Recently, with the switch in foreign languages pedagogy from teaching to learning, there has been considerable interest in the possible application of learning strategies to second or foreign languages. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) conclude on the basis of a number of studies that second language acquisition, far from being an exclusively implicit, intuitive process, 'entails active, dynamic mental processes that can broadly be grouped into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies'. Their three-fold categorisation of strategies for foreign or second language learning bears a close resemblance to the categories for learning in general as identified by Nisbet and Shucksmith and others.

- ***Metacognitive strategies***

According to O'Malley and Chamot, these involve 'thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task and evaluating how well one has learned' (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Specific examples are making plans, directing one's attention to what is to be learnt, identifying a problem to be solved, monitoring and evaluating one's own progress and performance.

- ***Cognitive strategies***

These involve, 'interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, or applying a specific technique to a task'. Specific examples include taking notes, making summaries, making inferences as to meaning, seeking contact with and enlisting the support of speakers of the language.

- ***Social / affective strategies***

These involve, 'interacting with another person to assist learning, or using affective control to assist a learning task'. Specific examples are: asking questions for clarification, cooperating with others, talking to oneself or others in order to boost one's confidence.

Successful foreign-language learners, then, are considered to apply the sorts of strategy given above. This view emphasises what learners themselves can consciously do in order to achieve success, rather than on the workings of an inborn mechanism. Unlike the traditional grammar/translation approach however, learners' conscious learning is applied not only to grammar but also to other aspects of communicative competence, including strategies for dealing with different kinds of task.

Some important questions arise. Are these strategies teachable to unsuccessful learners? If so, will this make them more successful? Are they equally accessible to all learners, irrespective of age, or do they apply more to older learners? What can teachers do in order to encourage the development of these strategies? There is some evidence from O'Malley and Chamot and others that strategies of this kind can indeed help unsuccessful foreign language learners to become more successful.

The picture is less clear with learners of primary school age. In our own research within the national pilot projects in Scotland (Low, Duffield, Brown and Johnstone, 1993), we found that eight-year-old pupils were consciously aware of almost as many learning strategies as the eleven-year-olds in the same schools, but that the strategies differed in some respects. The eleven-year-olds had a clearer sense of the potentially worrying, problematical nature of foreign-language learning but had begun to develop strategies for coping with this. They had also begun to develop strategies for the mid to long-term, for example a particular activity may not be great fun at present but it will be good for you in the long run. The younger learners showed no sense of anxiety or problems and did not think beyond the immediate present. Consequently they did not need to have strategies for dealing with these aspects at that stage.

■ *Social-psychological distance*

Some researchers claim that social and attitudinal factors play a major role in learning another language. Schumann (1975, 1978), for example, identifies two sorts of characteristic: affective characteristics (for example motivation, empathy, ego-permeability) and social characteristics (for example ability to fit into groups, to help groups jell together and to feel at home in other cultures). He claims that these, 'may be as important or even more important than neurological maturation in accounting for differences in adult learning'. In other words, if we are not motivated, if we cannot empathise with other cultures, if our minds are closed and cannot be permeated, if we won't mix with other people, then we are unlikely to be successful in learning other languages. Schumann locates learners on a social-psychological proximity scale. Those who perceive themselves as being near to the other culture will acquire the other language better than those who perceive themselves as distant from it.

This theory does not explain the nature of any internal processes that may be at work, but it has a strong ring of credibility for circumstances in the United Kingdom. Our famed inability to learn foreign languages cannot be inborn. Indeed, in defining such languages as 'foreign' rather than as 'second' we add to the social-psychological distance that separates us from others. Our insularism has had the effect of putting a filter round our personality, thereby reducing our 'empathy' towards foreigners and making us less 'permeable' to foreign influences, including language. It is quite likely, however, that the advent of the Single Market and the increased sense of Europeanness that is now being promoted throughout our society, will reduce the social-psychological distance between ourselves and other Europeans and make us more predisposed to the acquisition of other languages. A major aim of introducing foreign languages in Scottish primary schools must surely be to contribute to these processes.

According to Schumann, the essential component in acculturation is the individual's social and psychological contact with the target language group. Acculturated learners will positively seek contact with native speakers of the other language, at home and in the other country, and will therefore put themselves in the position of being receptive to a greater amount of foreign

language input and interaction than non-acculturated learners. An implication of this view for children in primary schools would be that cultural awareness would be a central aim of the programme and not simply an off-shoot of an essentially language-based approach. If empathy and understanding are created by a good teacher, then the foreign-language acquisition process will be more likely to flourish.

However, there is nothing automatic about the development of cultural awareness. Research on early secondary pupils in the North of England (Byram, 1989) showed that after two or three years of teaching based largely on tourist transactions, some pupils appeared to end up with cultural stereotypes reinforced rather than diminished. Byram argues it will be important therefore to find ways of blending language awareness, culture awareness, culture experience and language learning into one coherent approach.

PROGRESSION

The term progression is understood here as the development of learners' language from a communicative system that is fairly rudimentary to one that is more powerful and nearer to that of a native speaker of the language.
There are some very obvious ways in which to think about progression. For example, we expect learners to make progress along the following parameters:

- fluency, accuracy, range (to become more fluent, more accurate, more wide-ranging in their use of language)
- length and complexity (to deal with increasingly lengthy and complex language)
- cognitive level of task (to undertake progressively more demanding tasks, for example beginning with simple conversations, then later telling stories, reporting, interviewing, discussing, and perhaps later still debating, explaining, negotiating, persuading, theorising, evaluating... by which time of course pupils have moved well beyond primary school).

Progression in communicative competence

Let us now consider progression in relation to five components of communicative competence as set out on previous pages. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

It is one thing to define parameters for progression in language development, as above. It is more difficult to envisage how language actually builds up along and across these different parameters:

- does it build evenly across all parameters at the same time, (eg fluency, range, discourse), or does it do so at different rates?
- what is the effect on other parameters of build-up of language on one parameter?
- may progress in one, for a while mean regress in others? If our fluency spurts forward, for example, does our grammatical control keep pace?

The most appropriate kind of research for dealing with these questions would probably be longitudinal, following particular groups of learners through their

time in school and charting in detail what they were able to do at particular times in relation to the dimensions of communicative competence outlined above. However, such evidence hardly exists. The best one can do is to piece

Figure 2: Progression in components of communicative competence

BASIC → ADVANCED

The learner acquires and uses/displays

Grammatical	→	*more words, eg nouns, adjectives, verbs* →
	→	*more structures, eg tenses, question forms, agreements* →
	→	*more systematic control of above* →
Socio-linguistic	→	*more functions, eg offering, refusing, requesting* →
	→	*more adaptable and appropriate use of language* →
Strategic	→	*more achievement / coping / repair strategies* →
	→	*more planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies* →
Discourse	→	*more techniques for coherence and cohesion* →
	→	*more ability in turn-taking, referring back, opening, closing* →
Cultural	→	*more sensitivity to other cultures* →
	→	*more techniques for learning about other cultures* →

together some of the picture, while remaining aware that there is still much to learn.

I shall discuss two areas in which the build-up of progression is still problematical. These are in interlanguage development and in L1–L2/FL interdependence.

Interlanguage development

Practical experience in the classroom makes it abundantly clear that a grammar rule that has been consciously taught and learnt is normally not fully internalised at the time. When pupils are doing an activity for which they have been given lots of preparation time, then possibly they will be able to incorporate a recently-learnt grammar point correctly into their spoken or written output. If, however, the activity is spontaneous rather than planned, it is possible that the grammar point may appear, but not necessarily in the 'correct' form in which it was taught.

Another way of stating this is that foreign or second-language learners are considered to pass through a series of interim languages, or 'inter-languages', as they progress towards the proficiency-level of the native speaker. The internalised grammar system that generates their spontaneous language output approximates gradually over time to that of a native speaker, but it is unlikely that it will ever fully get there, so most speakers of a foreign language perform at a more or less advanced level of interlanguage. By analogy we may think of children's first language development. Very young children operate a one-word, then a two-word, then a three-word, then a four-word grammar (if we allow some latitude to the concept of 'word'). The grammar system of a 4-year-old child is not as mature as that of an 8-year-old which in turn is less

developed than that of a 12-year-old. It therefore progresses through interim stages towards that of an adult, and we do not see anything wrong with this.

Examination of transcriptions of 10 and 11-year-old foreign language-learners at primary school suggest that two strategies may be in operation in respect of their spontaneous spoken output: prefabrication (the use of previously learnt whole phrases taken 'off the shelf' from long-term memory, possibly with some manipulation) and creativity (the use of grammar to spontaneously create novel utterances). Both strategies are normal and important. The prefabricated phrases tend to be longer and may be connected to form strings of phrases. They often exhibit correct native-speaker grammar, for example in narrating a fairy-story 'Ein König und eine Königin wohnen in einem großen Schloß ... Sie haben eine schöne Tochter ... Ihr Haar ist so schwarz wie Ebenholz.' The spontaneously created phrases tend to be shorter (often one-word or two-word) and to exhibit clear interlanguage features, for example 'Sport préféré est football'.

It is doubtful if the interim grammatical development of (say) a 10-year-old foreign language learner as expressed in spontaneous utterances follows exactly the same course over time as the grammatical development of a young child's first language, but there is undoubtedly some resemblance. Nor is it known what influences the sorting-out process that allows interim grammars to evolve towards native-speaker levels. The process may possibly be driven as much by the language acquisition device as by any sequence of grammar points taught explicitly in class, and, if so, then 'interim' forms should not be seen as mistakes but rather as a reflection of the particular interim stage that learners have reached as their competence develops. This, however, does not constitute an argument against explicit grammar teaching. Explicitly taught grammar is, at the very least, of considerable importance both in planned production (speaking and writing) and in planned and spontaneous comprehension (listening and reading).

The concept of 'variability' (cf Ellis, 1989) helps us to gain a clearer sense of what it is that influences a pupil's grammar control at any one time. We may think of any given language activity as being plotted on a number of different dimensions, for example:

planned ⟷	spontaneous
formal ⟷	informal
high cognitive ⟷	low cognitive demand
much teacher support ⟷	autonomous (little support)

Variability theory suggests that a pupil's performance, including control of grammar, will vary depending on contextual factors such as those above. Learners will have a chance of showing high grammar control in tasks that are 'planned, informal, with teacher support and intellectually easy' but their grammar control may break down somewhat when they attempt a task that is 'spontaneous, formal, autonomous and intellectually difficult'.

It follows that, if we wish to gain a valid picture of a pupil's grammar control, we should vary the range of tasks that they are asked to perform. This presents

a rather different picture from descriptions of language performance on most 'levels of attainment' schemes where control of grammar is seen as something that so-called 'able' pupils achieve, on the assumption that it is a permanent property of high ability. This is not necessarily so at all. Control of grammar by pupils, whatever their ability, will vary according to the characteristics of the context, as described above.

■ *L1–L2/FL interdependence*

There has always been debate about the role of the first language in the teaching of another language. The grammar/translation approach, for example, made extensive use of the first language, whereas communicative methods attach considerable importance to maximising the use of the foreign or second language in classrooms, without necessarily dispensing entirely with the first language.

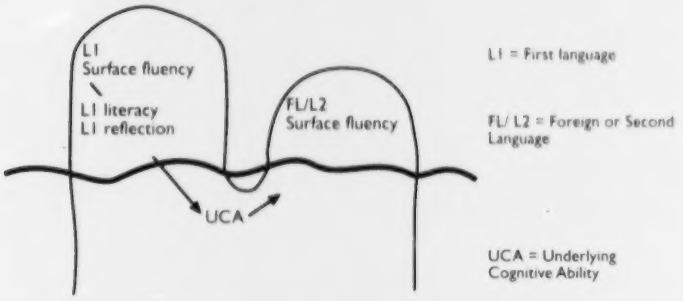
Through his research in Canada, Cummins (1984) has developed a well-received account (see Figure 3 on the following page) of how the two languages might be related, by means of his interdependence or dual iceberg theory. Above the surface, the first and the foreign/second language appear to be separate. Each facilitates communication with the outside world at a level of 'surface fluency'. Below the surface is the area of cognition. Translating this to the realm of schools, children come to primary schools with considerable surface fluency already established in their first language. Their education at primary school gives cognitive depth to this, mainly in two ways. Firstly, they gradually acquire literacy in the first language. This not only widens their repertoire of use of the first language, bringing in reading and writing to complement the listening and speaking that are already there, but it also gives them new insight into what language is and how it is structured. Secondly, they gradually learn to use the first language in order to regulate their thinking. Margaret Donaldson's seminal work on 'children's minds' establishes this point clearly. Language no longer deals exclusively with the outside world but becomes turned in on itself in order to control mental as well as physical acts (Donaldson, 1978). It becomes a major task for the primary school teacher then to slow down the pace of pupils' talk (their surface fluency), to encourage reflection and to help them learn how to think.

This takes us to what the aims of foreign-language learning at school ought to be. If it is 'surface fluency' that is required, then on Cummins' theory probably not much use need be made of the first language. What is needed is exposure to the foreign or second language and the motivation and opportunity to use it. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that school classrooms in the UK are not ideal places for meeting these conditions. With one teacher to a class of some 25 pupils, none of whom are native speakers of the other language, and with limited time available, there is a limit to the exposure, motivation and opportunity that can be provided, though communicative language teaching has increased these factors considerably.

However, if we are looking for a greater depth of foreign-language proficiency, then Cummins' interdependence or dual iceberg hypothesis

suggests how this may be achieved. Beneath the surface there is one process of cognition, developed through the first language, that can be transferred to support the additional language. It then makes sense to establish first language

Figure 3: First/second/foreign languages



Note: Adapted from Cummins (1984)

literacy and thinking skills in the initial years of primary school, so that comparable skills in the foreign/second language may gradually be developed. If these are not achieved through the first language, it is highly unlikely that they will be achieved in the foreign or second language.

■ *The interdependence model in early total immersion*

There is one circumstance in which the process is considered to work in reverse, ie in early total 'immersion' programmes. In these programmes, children go to primary school with surface fluency already established in their first language but take their curriculum in the additional language. In so doing, they establish not only surface fluency but also literacy, and to some extent, cognitive depth in their foreign or second language which then transfers to support their first language when this is introduced into the curriculum from primary year 3 or 4 onwards.

PROFICIENCY

The Standard Grade examination in Scotland at age 16 is designed to cover three broad levels of performance. The lower and middle levels tend to require basic communication on everyday topics, whereas the highest level assumes more cognitively demanding language. This points to the beginnings of two different types of FL proficiency: one having to do with practical communication, the other to do with higher-level academic skills. Elsewhere, Cummins has coined the terms BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive-academic language proficiency) to represent these two types of proficiency.

They differ in degree of contextual support and level of cognitive demand. Basic interpersonal communication skills is heavily contextualised and does not make high cognitive demands. Cognitive-academic language proficiency is less contextualised but more cognitively demanding. They may be represented as shown in figure 4.

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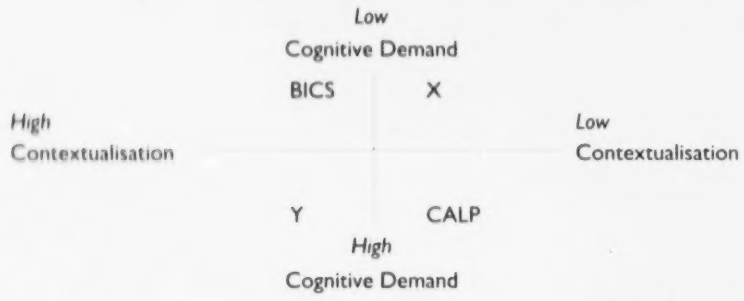
Figure 4: Types of foreign-language/second language proficiency



Note: Adapted from Cummins (1984)

One dimension is of cognitive demand. Tasks may be plotted at any point on this dimension. The other dimension is of contextualisation. High contextualisation implies activities in which language is only one element in the communication process. Others may be visuals, mime, actions, gestures and so forth. The language, therefore, does not have to do all of the work. Low contextualisation, on the other hand, implies activities in which language has to do all of the work, because there is little or no non-verbal support, as when writing a letter or a report or listening to the radio.

If the Cummins' hypothesis is valid, we have two very different types of proficiency. However, they are not totally separate, as is shown below:

CALP — decontextualised language; high cognitive demand
Y — contextualised language; high cognitive demand
X — decontextualised language; low cognitive demand
BICS — contextualised language; low cognitive demand.

It is clear that in the circumstances in which foreign languages are taught in UK schools, CALP will not be attainable by most pupils during their period of schooling. It would be wrong, however, to assume that progression in cognitive language proficiency would necessarily proceed from BICS to X to Y to CALP. Y-type activities might include, for example, making use of brochures, charts, statistics, displays in order to persuade an unwilling client to conclude a big deal. This would call for sophisticated use of language, for example negotiation, suggestion, persuasion, coercion, within a planned verbal plus non-verbal strategy, drawing heavily on sociolinguistic, strategic and possibly cultural competences, and in fact seems to me to be more demanding than (say) CALP-type activities such as writing academic essays.

It is clear from what is said above that CALP or Y-type proficiences will take many years to develop. In my view it would be counter-productive to devote the primary-school and early secondary years exclusively to the shorter-term proficiency levels implied in BICS and X-type activities. A longer-term strategy of progression that sows the seeds of CALP and Y from an early stage is also called for. It has to be stated there is little chance of Scottish pupils developing CALP or Y-type proficiencies to a level that matches continental standards so long as foreign languages are taught in secondary schools solely as school

subjects. For these types of proficiency to develop to a significant level, foreign languages would have to be additionally exploited within other curricular subjects also, as is increasingly happening in various countries in continental Europe.

The last two sections on progression and proficiency show how multi-faceted the concepts are, even when applied only to learners at primary school and early secondary. Much work remains to be done by teachers, working groups and researchers, before a clear idea will emerge, based on carefully monitored classroom experience, of the number and nature of stages that learners go through in their initial years of learning a foreign language through an embedding approach within a UK/ Scottish context.

4
EVIDENCE ON OUTCOMES

The previous chapters have considered different models of foreign-language provision and different views of the process of foreign language acquisition and learning. So, what does it all lead to? Can research tell us anything about the outcomes of all of the strategies, the efforts, the time and the resources that have been put into the teaching of foreign languages at primary school? In particular, can research tell us anything about the most appropriate age at which to begin modern languages in school (is it 5 years? 8 years? 11 years?), the conditions in which successful development takes place, and the kinds of proficiency that might reasonably be expected by the end of primary schooling?

The answer to some of these questions, frankly, is no. There are many important aspects of foreign-language teaching in primary schools that are relatively untouched by research, yet about which practical decisions must be taken. These decisions therefore, rightly, have to be taken on more pragmatic, commonsense grounds. However, if research cannot answer *all* our questions, it can at least shed light on some and it can help point to questions that would benefit from research-based answers in the future.

This chapter consists of the following main parts:

- evidence from UK primary schools
- evidence from immersion research
- evidence from research on particular aspects
- evidence favouring older learners
- evidence favouring younger learners.

The conclusions and implications of this evidence are discussed in the final chapter.

EVIDENCE FROM UK PRIMARY SCHOOLS

It is well known that current initiatives represent a fresh start after an initial abortive attempt beginning in the mid 1960s.

■ *England and Wales*

■ *NFER evaluation*

The NFER evaluation of French in selected primary schools in England and Wales (covering some 17,000 pupils) was published in 1974 (Burstall *et al*, 1974). Pupils generally began French at age eight and took it for three years at primary school. When they were 13, their performance was compared with that of a control group of the same age who had begun in secondary school at age 11. The pupils in the experimental group performed better in speaking and listening but pupils in the control group were equal, or possibly even superior, in reading and writing. By age 16, the experimental group had lost their advantage in speaking, while the control group remained superior in reading and writing. The experimental group at age 13 were also compared with pupils

two years older who had begun French at secondary and who had had roughly the same amount of French as the experimental group. The control group consisting of the older pupils was consistently superior on each kind of test.

Other findings of the NFER evaluation were firstly that girls reached a consistently higher level of achievement than did boys, a finding similar to that of Carroll's (1975) comparison of the teaching of French as a foreign language in eight countries, including England and Scotland, though here girls were ahead only in English-speaking countries; and secondly, there was a close association between the socio-economic status of children, their attitude to learning French and their subsequent attainment. Two factors influencing attitude were parental support and experience of travel abroad.

Do these findings necessarily mean that older learners do better than younger ones and that there are no clear linguistic advantages from three years of a foreign language at primary school which are maintained through secondary?

Before valid conclusions can be drawn, it is essential to take account of the context. In the experiment in England and Wales, many pupils went on to secondary schools in which the French teachers were ignorant of, or indifferent to, what had been taught at primary, with the consequence that progression in the language was likely to be impeded. Failure to maintain in secondary the possible benefits of French at primary may therefore have had to do not only with the possible superiority of older over younger learners, but also with problems of transition, teacher attitude, continuity and progression. Another problem lay in the lack of foreign language competence and confidence of the primary school teachers. It has also been claimed (Buckby, 1976) that certain of the NFER assessments did not yield a valid measure of some of the competences that pupils had in fact developed at primary school.

■ *Awareness / Encounter*

In the Basingstoke (Hampshire) language awareness project, one secondary and six primary schools were involved, with pupils drawn from both infant and junior sections of the schools (Years 3 to 6). Four foreign-language assistants were employed: two French, one German and one Spanish. The aims of the project were a mixture of encounter and awareness: firstly to promote the experience that speaking other languages is a simple and natural way of communicating, and secondly, to encourage an awareness of other lifestyles. It was not an aim that one modern language should be taught systematically. Pupils received contact with all three, as the foreign-language assistants rotated round the schools in pairs on a carousel basis, in order to collaborate with classteachers. The evaluation (Mitchell, Martin and Grenfell, 1992) reveals a flourishing project, with positive attitudes on the part of pupils who appreciated contact with relatively young, real speakers of the three foreign languages. Almost all pupils welcomed the opportunity to encounter more than one language. The foreign-language assistants used their language extensively as a means of communication in activities and topics, including songs, rhymes, games, greetings, colours, family, numbers, foods.

Certain matters were identified for further consideration. There was a slight danger of sameness arising from the same sorts of activity being used with older as well as younger pupils. The foreign-language assistants were recruited each year with the consequence that there might be problems of continuity of information and approach. The evaluators also recommended 'slowing the carousel down slightly' without losing the important principle of variety of languages as many pupils found it confusing to encounter more than one additional language during the same time-block or in close succession.

In addition, although there was much evidence that the first aim was being achieved, there was less direct evidence for the second, ie awareness of other lifestyles. This raises the question of how intercultural awareness may be raised in primary school projects in which direct experience of one or more foreign languages is seen as very important.

Scotland

HMI report (Scotland)

In 1969 HM Inspectorate of Schools reported on the introduction of French in 106 primary schools (325 classes) in eight areas of Scotland out of a total of 500 that were involved. Among the findings they reported that there was a lack of continuity at transition to secondary; that many teachers lacked sufficient competence in the language and that many felt the work was being imposed on them; that pupils' ability to understand spoken French was reasonably satisfactory, their fluency was very varied, their stock of vocabulary was poor and their ability to transfer what they had learnt to new situations was disappointing.

Other research in Scotland

Further evidence from Scotland is provided by Nisbet and Welsh (1972) who conducted a small study of the effects of learning French in Aberdeen primary schools. They compared a group of pupils who had had French in their last year at primary school (Group F) with a group who had not (Group NF). Group F consisted of 964 pupils who had had French in the final year of primary school from a teacher on the authority's list of teachers of French for primary schools. Group NF consisted of 867 pupils who began to study French at secondary.

By the end of the first term of secondary, Group F scored higher on a test of the aural comprehension of French vocabulary but the difference had largely disappeared by the end of the first year secondary. However the advantage for Group F was maintained in two schools that were distinctive in their use of audio-visual material, television and the language laboratory and where the teachers had positive attitudes to the teaching, and teachers, of French in primary schools. All differences in linguistic attainment had disappeared by the end of second year secondary.

Nonetheless, Group F showed a more positive attitude. Although at the end of first year secondary, only 30% of Group F rated French within their favourite three subjects as against 42% of Group NF, by the end of second year secondary 50% of Group F included French as against 36% of Group NF. A

higher proportion of Group F continued with French when it became an optional subject in third year. Nisbet and Welsh suggest that a justification for the inclusion of a foreign language in primary schools might be in terms of its contribution to the enlargement of interests and understanding and the development of a general language skill.

■ *The Scottish pilot projects*

The aims and organisation of the Scottish pilot projects were described in Chapter 2. The two aims of the research were set by the Scottish Office as (Aim 1) an assessment of the linguistic attainments of pupils who had had a foreign language at primary school, including comparison with those who had not, and (Aim 2) evaluation of the courses and methods adopted, with, if possible, an indication of any links between particular courses and methods adopted and particular successful outcomes in linguistic attainment. In most of the projects, staffing consisted of a visiting secondary teacher working in collaboration with the primary classteacher.

Our interim findings pointed to an advantage for the pilot pupils in terms of Aim 1, ie after a year at secondary those pupils who had had a foreign language at primary were linguistically more advanced in a number of ways than those who had not:

> From the evidence ... from classroom observation, it appeared that ... they displayed a greater readiness to answer orally and (for S1 at least) were more likely to use 'phrase-sentence' rather than one-word answers ... Evidence from the paired interviews in the same year suggested project pupils had some advantage in structural complexity, pronunciation, resistance to relapsing into the mother tongue and initiation and response (particularly asking questions of the researcher), but not in grammatical accuracy. The 'project advantage' was detected across the ability range, but it was notable that there were substantially fewer project than non-project pupils among those whose attainments were minimal.
>
> (Low, Duffield, Brown and Johnstone, 1993)

In addition, the pilot pupils were more confident, more willing to express themselves and to use coping or repair strategies (cf Canale's 'strategic competence') if problems arose. Moreover, it was clear that pupils carried a positive attitude to foreign language learning with them, based on their primary school experiences. At the same time, however, the research team found relatively little ability to manipulate language in accordance with structural rules. There was some slight evidence of ability to manipulate language creatively but this tended to be in combinations of two to three words, revealing what in the previous chapter was called 'interim' rather than fully developed levels of grammatical control. Where longer phrases were used, these appeared to be mainly prefabricated rather than spontaneously created.

The later stages of our research will attempt to refine the picture of what pupils in the project can do in P6, P7 and S1, in order to gain a sense of their progression in the language. In addition, we shall be following a sample of pupils further through their secondary education towards the national examinations in S4, as well as investigating a number of matters in primary and early secondary schools relating to Aim 2, in particular the themes of continuity

between primary and secondary school, of instruction about language and of learning strategy.

EVIDENCE FROM IMMERSION RESEARCH

■ Immersion in Canada

■ Implications for attainment

A major question in 'early total' immersion in Canada has been whether English-speaking children whose literacy develops initially in French (their second language) are disadvantaged in English. Harley's (1991) review shows that in the first few grades English-speaking children on a French-immersion programme score consistently less well in English literacy tests than do English-speaking children who are not on a French-immersion programme, but after the introduction of English to the French-immersion programme (often after three years), then the French-immersion pupils score as well as or possibly better than their non-immersion counterparts on standardised tests of literacy in English. This lends strong support to Cummins' first language/second language interdependence theory. However, since French-immersion programmes tend mainly to be taken by children from middle-class families, research continues on the impact of immersion on children from lower socio-economic groups, children of low ability and children with specific learning disabilities.

So far as the learning of subject-matter is concerned, French-immersion children appear to do as well as their non-immersion counterparts at elementary school (Genesee, 1987), but according to Harley (1991) the picture is not yet clear concerning secondary school. So far as proficiency in French is concerned, French-immersion students develop excellent listening and reading skills, for example scoring almost as well in standardised listening tasks as children whose first language is French (Swain and Lapkin, 1986), but according to Harley (1991) they do not approach native-speaker levels in productive skills (speaking and writing) in respect of grammatical and socio-linguistic competences. Here there appears to be consensus among Canadian researchers that there is room for improvement.

■ Starting point for immersion

Research continues into the relative impact of late, middle and early immersion programmes. Early immersion students appear to have the advantage in speaking and listening, but late immersion students appear to catch up in reading and writing. Harley (1986) contrasts early immersion beginning in kindergarten, late immersion beginning in Grade 7 (age 13) and an extended form of subject-teaching, also beginning in Grade 7. All three groups, together with a group of native speakers of French, were assessed when in Grade 10 (age 16). All groups were matched for IQ. The findings showed: firstly, some advantage for the early immersion group for example better use of the imperfect and conditional tenses; secondly, some areas in which there were no differences, for example time distinctions, number and gender agreement, and range of vocabulary; and thirdly, some advantages for the late-entry students in reading and writing, deriving from access to written forms of the

second language at an early point in their programme and an early focus on the language code. This final point again appears to substantiate the transfer of CALP (Cognitive-academic language proficiency) from first to second language, as hypothesised by Cummins.

A recent immersion study reported by Lapkin, Hart and Swain (1991) features a large-scale evaluation in Canada. In this evaluation twenty-six Grade 8 classes (pupils aged 13-14) were assessed, some having had early immersion and others middle immersion programmes in metropolitan Toronto. The results showed that the middle immersion classes had less consistent levels of performance than those having had early immersion. The middle immersion programme began at Grade 5 (pupils aged 10-11), with 50% of instructional time provided in French throughout, whereas early immersion was of the 'total' variety and began at kindergarten. The tests were varied and as communicative as possible. Early immersion classes performed better in almost all respects involving listening, speaking, reading and writing. The differences between the groups at Grade 8 were substantial and important, and the researchers concluded that early and middle immersion pupils could not reasonably be placed together in the one classroom at Grade 9.

■ *Partial immersion in Australia*

An evaluation of German-immersion in Melbourne primary schools is reported by Clyne (1991). Three different approaches were investigated:

- *Model A:* a partial immersion programme in which there were some five hours of German per week for science, art and physical education, and with music and social studies each being shared between English and German.
- *Model B*: two half-hours of German-language teaching per week.
- *Model C*: one hour per week of language instruction and two hours per week of German-medium teaching in social studies, science and music, movement and drama.

The evaluation found Model A to have advantages over Model C, and especially over Model B, in several respects, for example a higher level of performance on a wide range of language tests, and better integration of language and culture. Older starters in each school tended to score better than younger starters, but the difference was significant only in Model B. It appears that Grade 3 was the best starting-point, by which time children had developed literacy in their first language which they were able to transfer to German as their second language, with clear benefits in spelling over children who had begun German before the onset of literacy in their first language.

What is also significant about the Melbourne initiative is that it was implemented initially in three schools only, on a voluntary basis, and is gradually being extended to the point that the final national policy document on languages recommends that there should be 'where possible immersion bilingual teaching as a method of second-language teaching' (Lo Bianco, 1987).

EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH ON PARTICULAR ASPECTS

■ Intensive teaching

Lightbown and Spada (1991) assessed students of English as a second language at Grade 11 (aged 16-17) on a non-immersion approach in Quebec. Group A had had intensive instruction for two years, in Grades 5 and 6, then normal instruction thereafter. Group B had had the regular programme, without intensive instruction. The two groups were compared at Grade 11 for volubility and for accuracy, in order to establish whether the two years of intensive instruction in Grades 5 and 6 were still of benefit to students by the time they were in Grade 11. The results indicated that Group A (intensive instruction in Grades 5 and 6) maintained their superiority up to and including Grade 11, even though they had had the same amount of English as the other group from Grade 7 onwards. In other words, periods of intensive instruction within a 'normal', non-immersion programme appear to have lasting gains and may represent a feasible option that authorities in the UK might wish to evaluate further.

■ Literacy in the first language

Swain and Lapkin (1991) focused on cultural minority groups in Canada. One group consisted of children of an Italian background, while the other group contained a mixture of Armenian, Croatian, Greek, Polish, Ukrainian and other backgrounds. The first language was Italian, Armenian, Polish etc, the second language was English and the third (the object of the investigation) was French as a core school subject, ie not on an immersion model. The researchers concluded that the pupils' attainment in French as third language did not depend on high levels of oral proficiency in their first language, nor on any links between their first language and French. It was more related to their degree of literacy in their first (heritage) language. Literacy in the heritage language was considered to support attainment in French as a third language when taught as a school subject.

A feeling of security held by pupils in respect of their heritage (minority) culture, to the point of achieving literacy in the heritage language, provided the most sound basis for confronting other cultures and their languages at school. The heritage language and culture were not 'submerged' but valued and built upon. This finding has major implications for educational policies on the importance of enabling children to become literate in their first language, particularly if it is the heritage language of a cultural minority.

■ Impact of learning a foreign language on command of first language

To what extent does the learning of a foreign language help pupils with their first language? This is a very important question that teachers and parents often ask themselves. To begin with, however, let us remember that there is a very strong connection in the reverse direction. There can be no doubt that if pupils develop a strong command of their first language, including the ability to read and write it well, this will help them greatly in learning a foreign language. Cummins' interdependence model, for example, suggests strongly that under-

lying powers of cognition developed through the first language can successfully be applied to the learning of another language. So, does the formula work equally well in reverse? Here, it is not possible to be as confident, and the evidence is at best suggestive. Indeed, Burstall (1974) set out to establish whether learning French at primary school helped pupils with their English, and found no positive connection. On the other hand, in the much more recent evaluation of the national pilots in Scotland, several teachers claimed on the basis of their classroom experience that pupils who had begun a foreign language at primary school had in some way or other been helped in their first language also, and had certainly received a boost to their confidence.

There are two research studies from elsewhere which shed some light on this matter.

First, in a psycholinguistic research study Yelland, Pollard and Mercuri (1993) compared two matched groups of monolingual English children beginning Grade 1 at primary school in Australia. One group received no experience of a foreign language at school; the other received one hour per week of Italian. After six months the researchers found that the second group were significantly more advanced in 'word awareness' than the first. That is, even a very limited introduction to a foreign language had helped the second group to understand that words are not inherent properties of the objects they represent. Totally monolingual children not unnaturally assume that the word 'table' for example somehow is part of the object that it denotes, whereas even young children at the beginners stage of foreign-language learning quickly pick up that this is not so, and thereby learn something very important about the relations between human language and the world about us.

In addition, Pinto and Pilotti (1993) provide a fascinating insight into the effects of a particular languages policy at primary school in one part of Italy. Children in the Piedmont region of Italy speak a dialect that is different from standard Italian. An experiment was set up, involving two different year-groups: Primary 1 and Primary 3. For each year-group the 'experimental' classes received half an hour instruction per day in each of three languages: their regional dialect, Italian and English, in a fixed sequence. In each case, written language was introduced from the start. The 'control' classes for each year-group, on the other hand, received instruction in Italian only. The two sets of classes (experimental and control) were matched for IQ and for spoken Italian at the start of their year of instruction. At the end, they received tests in reading, narration and pictorial description in standard Italian.

At Primary 1 level, the experimental group were significantly higher on both IQ and on all aspects of Italian. At Primary 3 level, the experimental group, though not superior to a statistically significant level, were nonetheless still clearly superior. The researchers conclude that a systematic multilingual experience that includes standard and regional varieties of their first language, as well as of the foreign language, and that brings written language immediately into play in all three languages, far from disturbing children's natural language competence, seems to improve it considerably.

On the basis of the evidence, then, it seems reasonable to assume a strong potential influence of first language on the learning of a foreign language, and a weaker but nonetheless important potential effect in the reverse direction. This reverse effect will apply particularly when teachers encourage their pupils to reflect on and discuss the vocabulary, the grammar and the discourse of the foreign language they are learning, and the strategies they might adopt in order to learn and use it, and to make connections where possible with their first language.

EVIDENCE FAVOURING OLDER LEARNERS

■ Research findings

Burstall was interested in the outcomes of attempts to teach a foreign language at school to learners of different ages. In her review of research evidence (Burstall, 1978), among the studies she quotes are: Grinder (1961) who investigated the learning of Japanese by children of different ages and found that the older children's performance was constantly superior; Stern (1963) who reported on the learning of English in Swedish elementary schools by pupils aged 7 to 11 and found that older pupils learnt all aspects more quickly and accurately, including pronunciation; and Asher and Price (1967) who studied beginners aged 8 to 14, and also adults, learning Russian and found that adults dramatically excelled the 8-14 groups. Burstall's conclusion, based on her own NFER evaluation and review of other research, was that:

> The most conservative interpretation which the available evidence would appear to permit is that the achievement of a skill in the foreign language is primarily a function of the amount of time spent studying it, but it is also affected by the age of the learner, older learners tending to be more efficient than younger ones.

Other findings supportive of older learners are: Oller and Nagato (1974) who assessed pupils in Japanese schools learning English at Grades 7, 9 and 11. At each level there were pupils who had had six years of English before Grade 7, and others who had not. At Grade 7 there was a highly significant difference favouring those who had had English, but the difference was reduced by Grade 9 and insignificant by Grade 11, with the implication that older beginners are able to learn as much in five years as younger beginners do in eleven. Ekstrand (1978) found that beginners aged 11 in Swedish primary schools performed better than beginners aged eight. Snow and Hofnagel-Hohle (1978), investigating the learning of English in Holland by children and by adolescent learners, found a faster acquisition rate in the adolescent group who were expected to learn aspects of school subject-matter through the second language. Accordingly, they were confronted by tasks that were more cognitively demanding than were the tasks for the younger learners and as a consequence may have been motivated to a greater effort.

■ Arguments favouring older beginners

On the school-based evidence presented thus far, it would appear that older (adolescent and adult) foreign language learners have the advantage over

younger (pre-adolescent) learners. Why might this be so? Various possible reasons have been suggested:

- purpose and choice
- grasp of concepts
- negotiation of meaning
- grammatical generalisation
- learning strategies.

Each of these is discussed briefly in turn.

Purpose and choice

Older learners normally learn another language by choice, unlike pupils at school for whom it is often a requirement. This element of choice probably reflects a favourable attitude and positive motivation. Moreover, many older learners know why they have chosen to learn this language, for example for tourism, business or national examinations, whereas many children are not so clear. Clarity of purpose may allow adults to decide for themselves what their aims are and what the criteria might be by which success and personal satisfaction may be judged.

Grasp of concepts

Ausubel (1964) claims that adults have a much greater vocabulary in their first language than do children, and 'so they do not have to acquire thousands of new concepts in the foreign language as children do but only the new verbal symbols representing these concepts.' A similar view is expressed by Vilke (1988) who reveals that children in Croatia had difficulty with words such as 'kettle' which was more difficult than 'bottle' (though they are phonetically similar), because in Zagreb kettles are not common (Croatians being a nation of coffee drinkers). Similarly, 'fireplace' was more difficult than 'television', because homes in Zagreb are rarely heated by means of fireplaces. This may suggest that children transfer concepts they have acquired in their first language into their foreign language, but have difficulty with concepts specific to the foreign culture.

Negotiation of meaning

Scarcella and Higa (1982) claim that, in natural settings, adults take a more active role than do children in negotiating, understanding and sustaining conversations. In doing so, they obtain a greater amount of challenging input and tailor this to their learning needs. Children, lacking such skills in conversational management, may receive input that is either too simple to promote further development of the foreign language or too difficult for them to understand. The difference between children and older learners in the input they invite provides a rationale for the more rapid progress by older learners in foreign language acquisition. This argument does not, however, mean that children are incapable of 'negotiating meanings'. The research of Tizard and Hughes (1984), for example, indicates that four-year-old girls possess well-developed skills when negotiating meanings in their first language with their mothers at home. Their problem did not consist of a lack of negotiating skill but rather of an inability to transfer it to the different context of their nursery

school, partly because of the ways in which the nursery-school teachers perceived their pupils.

Grammatical generalisation

Ausubel and many others have claimed that adults are better able to make conscious grammatical generalisations and to apply them in order to manipulate language for their own purposes, whereas young children are 'limited to the much less efficient approach of discovering syntactical rules through repetitious exposure to models and corrective feedback' (Ausubel, 1964).

Learning strategies

Adults tend to be more efficient learners than children, in that they are able to bring metacognitive as well as cognitive strategies into play (cf O'Malley and Chamot). That is, they have a greater capacity than children to plan, to monitor, to evaluate—and these procedures can clearly be very helpful in learning anything, including a language.

Aims differ

If the discussion above points to certain advantages for adult learners and perhaps explains why, in formal educational settings, they often perform better than young children, it is important to bear in mind that there must be very different aims for adults and children in learning a foreign or second language. Adults will tend to be more mature, already 'formed' by their education and experience of life. Children on the other hand are less mature and by no means fully 'formed'. Any learning experience at primary school, including foreign-language learning, must surely be intended to contribute to their 'formation'. It is to be justified not only by linguistic attainment, nor even by communicative competence, but also by the extent to which it broadens perspectives, enhances learning, stimulates imagination and thought, forms attitudes and enables opportunities to be perceived.

EVIDENCE FAVOURING YOUNGER LEARNERS

Research findings

Burstall's research already cited, and review of other research, does not so much question the *capacity* of children to develop competence in foreign languages as raise questions about the conditions in schools which may be successful in accomplishing this, particularly in relation to transfer from primary to secondary school. Recently, the balance of argument has swung back towards foreign languages in primary schools. Evidence has already been provided from total or partial immersion programmes that an early start can be advantageous. There is further evidence, not based on immersion.

The younger the better

A major figure in France is Rachel Cohen who was director of a bilingual school in Paris for ten years and subsequently a researcher in young children's learning at the University of Paris. It is her view that 'the younger the better', that young children are better equipped than adults not only because their brains are more predisposed to language acquisition but also because they read fewer

problems into the process than adults do. Her research indicates that immigrant children of 3-4 years of age, speaking not a word of French on arrival at elementary school, learned French as a second language holistically by involvement in play, singing, repetition, imagination and story-telling. She found that three-year-old children very quickly acquired a native-speaker accent, that this took longer in seven-year-olds and that 11-year-olds, despite much more time and effort, never quite got to the same level. She believes that 11 must be about the least appropriate age for beginning a foreign language, because this is the age of transition to another type of school and also the age at which most children start growing and maturing physically, with the consequence that they cannot be expected to cope with so much change and also take on something as new as an additional language.

Her research (Cohen, 1987, 1992) points to a pedagogy radically different from what commonly applies at present, in that it is based on the simultaneous development of both spoken and written language and recently has involved the use of computers with speech synthesis, enabling pupils to hear the letters, words and phrases that they type in. Her principle of, 'write in order to read; read in order to speak; speak in order to write,' represents a major point of departure from the assumption that young children necessarily best acquire a second or foreign language in much the same way as they acquire their first one. Although circumstances in Scottish primary schools are very different from an elementary school in Paris, her research merits serious attention and further experimentation, to see if her principle has validity in other contexts.

■ *Before and after puberty*

School-based evidence favouring younger learners, in some aspects at least, is reported by Vilke (1988). In its first stage, the research focused on the extent to which children in Zagreb learn English as foreign language with ease before puberty, compared with those who have passed the so-called 'critical period'. There were 60 beginners aged nine and a similar number of beginners aged 17-19, receiving similar language, methods, techniques, and amount of instruction, though care was taken that the teaching should suit both age-groups, an almost impossible task as Vilke herself admits. The post-puberty group had certain advantages: more insight into the functioning of language, more intellectual maturity and were faster learners of structure and vocabulary. However, the pre-puberty group were 'far superior in mastering the phonetic system'. In 1984 the first cohort of early starters reached their final year of primary school. Their performance was compared with a control group who had begun at Grade 4. More students in the control group saw English as a problem subject, more were afraid of bad marks in English and felt more need for more periods of English in the week. The experimental group, on the other hand, had become acquainted with a concept of English in a way that corresponds to their ideas of 'interesting' and 'amusing', whereas the control group emphasised its usefulness.

Among Vilke's conclusions were that: firstly, an early start has a positive influence on most pupils' attitudes to English; secondly, young children can

master with ease the phonetics of a foreign language, if they have good models to imitate; thirdly, vocabulary items for which they have not developed concepts in their own culture present difficulty; and, fourthly, that foreign-language learning should begin well before puberty, to enable children to acquire a good command of the sounds of the language, a limited body of structures and vocabulary and to develop feelings of security and confidence.

The research points to the crucial role of the teacher. Feeling at ease and having a positive link with the teacher accounted for the greater part of the success of individual children. Vilke comments that in the circumstances obtaining in Zagreb, positive attitude was a product rather than a cause of successful foreign-language experiences at school. This so-called 'resultative hypothesis' is in line with what other European researchers (for example Hermann, 1980) claim to have found. It can be contrasted with the 'motivation-as-cause' findings of researchers in Canada (for example Gardner, 1985) where a positive attitude springing from an implicit wish among many Canadians that their society should become bicultural and bilingual, was perceived as a cause of successful second-language learning.

The reasons for an early start in foreign language learning may be summarised as:

- more time
- better pronunciation, intonation
- acquisition and learning
- languages less problematical
- educative value, attitude and self-concept.

Each of these is discussed briefly in turn.

■ *More time*

Children beginning at (say) eight years of age are likely to have more time available than those beginning at 11 or 12. Strictly speaking, the time factor is not the same as the age factor but given the fairly fixed lines of curriculum design for pupils in the initial years of secondary school, in the UK at any rate, there is not much opportunity for secondary beginners to match primary beginners in the overall amount of time for foreign-language learning. A secondary beginner, therefore, cannot expect to have as much time available overall as a primary beginner. The age factor then brings the time factor into play. This is important, since there are no short-cuts to the development of a rounded proficiency in a foreign language that draws on both basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as discussed earlier.

■ *Better pronunciation, intonation*

It has already been indicated (eg Vilke, 1988; Guberina, 1991; and also Kovacevic, 1993) that young children appear to have a special facility for acquiring the sound system of a foreign language, almost to native-speaker level. It is very unlikely that adult beginners will attain this same facility, though they may nonetheless still develop a respectable and reasonably authentic

command. In the case of children, what counts greatly must be the models on which their sound system is based. When the teacher at elementary school, as in French immersion classes in Canada, is a native speaker of the language, then there is a good chance that the children will acquire a very good accent. If however the teacher at primary school were a non-native speaker with an uncertain and at times incorrect command of the sound system, then some damage can be done, precisely because of young children's sensitivity to sound. The best formula would be likely to be a native-speaker classteacher plus access to native-speaker children of the same age-group, something that Canadian immersion programmes often do not provide but that interestingly enough is at times available in Gaelic-medium classes in Scotland, where non-Gaelic speaking children may find themselves in the same Gaelic-medium class as Gaelic-speaking children and with a Gaelic-speaking teacher.

■ *Natural acquisition and conscious learning*

It seems likely that young beginners differ from older beginners in the intuitions they develop about the language, eg whether particular language patterns feel authentic or not. Hawkins and Towell (1994) for example, report that non-English-speaking children aged 3–7 arriving in the United States attained native speaker performance, whereas new arrivals aged 7–39 did not. When length of exposure (five years) in the United States was held constant, it became apparent that the critical factor determining whether an L2 learner would attain native-speaker intuitions was age of initial exposure to the target language.

Moreover, given the greater amount of time overall at their disposal for foreign languages at school, younger beginners are in a position to benefit from both natural acquisition and conscious learning. Under severe pressure of time (as in a start at secondary school), natural processes are bound to suffer (not only in foreign language learning). With time available, on the other hand, longer-term developmental strategies can be planned in which children have an opportunity to acquire elements of language by natural means and, at a later stage, have the chance to engage in reflection on and analysis of what has been acquired (in terms of the processes of consciousness-raising and automatisation as discussed previously). In particular, there is time in primary school for a variety of practical, dramatic, psychomotor, and aesthetic activities to stimulate the natural acquisition process. If the age factor unlocks the time factor, then the time factor unlocks a variety of acquisition processes which have an opportunity to develop without undue pressure being put upon them.

■ *Languages less seen as a problem*

In Chapter 3 it was argued that the greater capacity of adults for detaching themselves from events and from such language as occurs in events, can be of benefit. Thus, for example, they may be more able to analyse what an event consists of, so as to develop a strategy for negotiating their way through the event; and they are more able than children to look at language analytically, so as to learn its grammatical and discourse structure. However, this detachment may be a mixed blessing. Adults, by dint of this very detachment, may perceive

problems where none exist. In this sense, children may be advantaged through their capacity to throw themselves into events, to enjoy them, not to worry too much about making mistakes or of making fools of themselves. Adolescents and adults, on the other hand, may be much more self-conscious and therefore find it more difficult to lower the 'affective filter' and as a consequence, tend to block certain kinds of foreign language input.

Educative value, attitude and self-concept

Any major experience of a foreign language at primary school must surely have an educative value as well as a purely instrumental aim (here of developing competence in a language). In this sense, a foreign language at primary school has enormous 'added value' to offer. It can help children learn about other ways of life and about language, by means that no other component of the primary curriculum can replicate (though of course other components can provide complementary insights). A foreign language introduced at primary school can therefore have a strong influence on the development of children's attitudes and self-concept. It can help them grasp a wider sense of community, beyond the peer-group, the locality, the region, the country, and it can help them begin to understand what is distinctive about the particular place where they live and the particular first language that they use. If uninformed, stereotyped, negative attitudes are allowed to develop in children (and let us not forget that many parents read nothing but the tabloid press, and several politicians still view 'Europeans' as fundamentally different from ourselves), these can prove very difficult to dislodge later. The introduction of a foreign language to younger learners encourages the development of a well-informed, positive attitude to the languages and ways of life of our neighbours, far and near, and the development of an international, as well as a national and local, sense of identity.

5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

What conclusions, then, may be taken from the evidence that has been presented and the claims that have been made? This chapter begins by offering some general conclusions from the research evidence discussed in previous chapters and then discusses a number of possible implications for Scotland.

STARTING AGE

For three reasons, caution is recommended in interpreting those research findings which appear to favour older over younger learners.

First, some of the older research studies, aiming to achieve a direct comparison between younger and older learners, had dubious design features. Some, for example, were based on the assumption that, in order to control the variable of 'teaching method', the different age-groups should be taught in much the same way. In fact it is very doubtful if teaching all age-groups in the same way is appropriate for any of them. Moreover, some of the assessments that were used for comparison between younger and older learners, for example cloze tests (based on filling in gaps in a text), may possibly be suitable for adults but are of doubtful validity when applied to children. Failure to do well in a cloze test may possibly indicate a lack of experience with cloze tests, or a lack of cognitive maturity, rather than a lack of competence in the foreign language. Research on on-going assessments in Scottish foreign-language classrooms (Johnstone, Kilburn and Kent, 1988) suggests strongly that pupils in the early years of secondary education perform better when their assessments reflect everyday classroom activity of the kind they are already familiar with.

Second, in most of the more recent studies, a number of factors were investigated together, for example age, time spent learning, distribution of time, teaching approach. This makes the drawing of conclusions about any one factor difficult, precisely because the factors are so interconnected.

Third, most of the evidence relates to outcomes as measured by tests. As the best Canadian researchers themselves have admitted, there has been relatively little research on what processes actually occur in classrooms as pupils of different ages attempt to learn a foreign or second language. Hence, there is not much information on how the outcomes, in fact, come about. It is worthy of note that research (for example Halsall and Wall, 1993) is now swinging towards investigations of classroom processes in addition to the attainment of outcomes. In principle, this can give us a better picture not only of what happens in class but also of the progressive build-up in complexity of the tasks pupils are asked to perform and of their performance on these tasks. The Stirling University evaluation of the national pilot projects in Scotland is investigating both process and product. Until the relationship between the two becomes clearer, we must be cautious about relying too much on what product alone appears to tell us.

The most comprehensive and authoritative academic account of research on age and foreign-language learning is by David Singleton (1989) who identifies four propositions:

- younger is better
- older is better
- younger is better for accent and basic interpersonal skills
- younger is better in the long run.

and concludes that:

> the one interpretation of the evidence which does not appear to run into contradictory data is that in naturalistic situations those whose exposure to a second language begins in childhood in general eventually surpass those whose exposure begins in adulthood, even though the latter usually show some initial advantage over the former. Moreover, if one takes due account of the exposure time variable, one can plausibly extend the 'younger = better in the long run' interpretation to cover formal learning situations.

I agree also with the distinguished Canadian researcher H H Stern (1976) who in the aftermath of Burstall, wrote:

> We must avoid the danger of creating a false dichotomy between Penfield and the theory of early language learning, and Burstall and the theory of later language learning, and of having to make a clear choice between them. On developmental grounds each age in life probably has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages for language learning ... In the sixties the mistake was made of expecting miracles merely by starting young. The miracles have not come about. Starting late as such is not the answer either.

To my mind, the evidence and arguments provided in previous chapters plus what has been stated above strongly support the introduction of a modern language in all primary schools. However, what should we expect from the process?

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF A LANGUAGES POLICY

Referring to experience in Canada, Stern suggests it is important to consider the kinds of outcome that society might wish to expect. He outlines three different levels of possible outcome for Canada:

- ***Basic competence***

—a capacity to live with understanding in a bilingual country and to take up the second language again later in life. This would be the level of outcome achievable by making improvements in the existing model of subject-teaching.

- ***Working knowledge***

—a useful command of reading, listening to the second language on the radio and of talking to French-speaking Canadians, covering most communicative needs in common contact situations. This would require teaching the second language as a subject but also teaching at least one other subject at school with second language as the medium of instruction.

- ***Bilingual competence***

—functioning effectively as a quasi-native speaker of the second language. This is likely to require some form of 'immersion'.

There is no suggestion that Stern's three-level model should automatically be applied to other countries without adaptation, but to my mind it does offer a helpful way of thinking about the aims and expectations that society might have in relation to foreign or second language policies, and the means of delivering these. At present Scotland falls short of securing even a 'basic competence' for its school leavers, as defined in the lowest of Stern's three levels.

■ *In the Scottish context*

Well then, what kind of foreign language proficiency do we in Scotland and the UK expect of our school leavers? Let us consider two hypothetical countries.

Country X

The foreign language is not offered at primary school but is taught to all pupils for two years at secondary, then to a dwindling elite thereafter. There is very little informal exposure to it in the media. Little use is made of it in the world of work.

Country Y

A foreign language is taught to all pupils in primary schools from (let us say) age nine or 10 and throughout their secondary schooling where it is treated not only as a subject but also as a means of enhancing other subjects. There is regular exposure to it through the informal media out of school. Substantial use is made of it in further education, higher education and the world of work.

Scotland has moved beyond Country X but is not yet near Country Y. The business community in Scotland, for instance, has only recently begun to awaken from its monolinguistic slumber and has a very long way to go before it could claim to be alert to the needs and possibilities that exist for foreign languages, to say nothing of having plans for meeting them. In Scotland, therefore, there is a great deal of pressure on the school system, not only to teach foreign languages, but to expose pupils to them and to argue a case for their use within the world of work. In consequence, it is not possible to state with confidence what society in Scotland wants from having foreign languages taught in the primary school, though it is right to acknowledge the clear lead given on this by the Scottish Office. Fortunately, the position is changing, as a groundswell of public interest builds up. Much will depend on how serious this public interest and support in fact are, because there is a limit to what educational structures themselves can achieve.

IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

So far as the future is concerned, we should bear in mind that pupils will be likely to take a foreign language at primary school for two years, carry it on at secondary school for four years and then carry it still further, whether at secondary school or in some other context. Even within this timespan, which is longer than is currently the norm in Scotland, it would be totally unrealistic

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to aim for 'bilingual competence' based on major immersion programmes. Staffing and resources would not suffice. I assume also that attitudes, in society as a whole and as well as in the teaching profession, would be against as radical a model in the foreseeable future.

Which approach?

The choice of approach then reduces to the options as set out in Chapter 2, or to some combination of these:

- awareness
- encounter
- subject-teaching
- embedding.

Awareness

National policy in Scotland has set its sights firmly against 'awareness'. I believe that this is right, since the awareness approach does not provide primary school pupils with the rich experience of the language on which their intuitive acquisition mechanisms can feed. Having observed pupils aged eight throwing themselves into foreign-language activities, coping well and taking great pleasure from the process, I conclude that an awareness approach on its own would be too detached and analytical, and too dependent on first-language activity.

Encounter

I also have reservations about the 'encounter' approach, if this means dipping into three or four languages, and I believe our politicians would rightly be most reluctant to allocate substantial sums of money for this purpose. What they understandably are looking for is a marked improvement in the foreign-language competence of school students by age 16, and both the awareness and the encounter approaches deny one of the most important justifications for foreign languages at primary, namely that it increases the length and amount of time available for learning the particular foreign language. At the same time, however, there is a lack of good research evidence on this, and it would be of interest to compare the progress through secondary of pupils who had followed an awareness or an encounter approach at primary.

Subject-teaching

Nor does the subject-teaching model commend itself for application at primary. Here it is pertinent to note a debate in Canada. Hammerly (1989) had questioned the benefits of immersion programmes, claiming that they failed to deliver an acceptable grammatical command of the language, and argued in favour of a return to the traditional teaching of French as a school subject, based on a clear sequence of grammar and involving two hours of French per day as from Grade 5. Collier (1992) rejects this idea not only on the grounds of misconceptions concerning language acquisition but also because of impracticality. She argues that: 'teachers barely have enough time to cover the core curricular subjects of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies in a given day; school administrators, teachers and parents would refuse to

accept a loss of one third of the curricular day to an exclusive focus on a foreign language'. Even if less time were proposed for foreign languages at primary in Scotland, the notion of a foreign language as a separate subject at primary school would generate more problems of time allocation and curricular fit than it would solve.

■ *Embedding*

The approach that seems most promising is based on 'embedding'. Although falling far short of even partial immersion, it at least allows for the exploitation of subject matter that is justified in the primary curriculum for other purposes. That is, it encourages the view that the purpose of learning a foreign language is not just to learn the language but also to experience or learn something about life through the language. As such, it provides a good basis for pupils later to reflect in their first language on what they have been experiencing or learning.

WHO SHOULD DO THE TEACHING?

Our evaluation of the Scottish pilot projects certainly showed that the model of a visiting secondary school teacher working alongside the primary classteacher enabled pupils to be exposed to a rich language input, for example based on story-telling, science or history lessons, to an extent that could scarcely have occurred had the teaching been undertaken by primary classteachers alone. The model also helped secondary teachers to gain a better understanding of what the primary school curriculum was about and promoted shared understandings.

It is clear, however, that in the future, after completion of the pilot phase, classteachers at primary school will have a much stronger role. There is understandable concern as to whether they will be able to fulfil this role, given their many other commitments. As from autumn 1993, in a rolling programme over three years, some 2500 primary school teachers will each receive some 27 days (160 hours) of special instruction in language and appropriate teaching methods. Much will depend on how successful this programme is and on the support that these teachers will undoubtedly continue to require thereafter.

A further source of teachers will come from building a foreign language into initial training programmes for primary teachers. Ideally, in the long term, all or most primary teachers would have taken a foreign language for two years as pupils at primary school, for six years at secondary (possibly with a second foreign language taken for some time at this stage) and for four years during their training to be teachers. To my mind this would not require an enormous input to their initial teacher-training programme, provided that there was continuity of language learning throughout the period.

There appear to be three different models for the provision of languages teachers for primary schools in Scotland:

- the supernumerary model: appointing additional supernumerary specialist primary school teachers, on the model of visiting teachers of music and art. There would be one teacher per school or group of schools, depending on size

- the drop-in model: having one teacher per school with 27 days training or equivalent. This teacher would not only introduce a foreign language to her or his class but would also at certain times in the week drop in on the classes of colleagues for that same purpose, while colleagues took the language teacher's class for some other aspect of the curriculum
- the inclusive model: all (or most) teachers in the upper primary would have received appropriate language training, whether by the 27 days or by incorporation into their pre-service programme, so that more or less each teacher was able to work in the foreign language with her or his own class.

It appears that the supernumerary model will not be adopted, possibly in part because of cost implications. In the short term, it is likely that the drop-in model will apply. If so, it is essential that this model should be carefully planned and monitored. Prima facie it creates difficulties with an 'embedding' approach and calls for careful curriculum planning and the highly organised, flexible deployment of staff. If the supernumerary model is not to be adopted, then I hope there will be a firm intention of moving in due course beyond the drop-in model towards the inclusive model. This will be the most likely way of enabling a culture of foreign-language learning and use to find its place within the general culture of the upper primary school, affecting headteachers and teachers as well as pupils. Without this mutually-supportive culture, I suspect there would be a gradual move away from 'embedding' towards 'awareness' or to the teaching of set-piece routines.

The inclusive model will add one further string to the bow of all or most teachers in the upper primary, but this of course will cause its own strains and so they will require regular support beyond their initial language-training. It is naive to assume that a foreign language as a living force will inevitably become as natural a part of a primary teacher's repertoire as (say) the mathematics, the environmental studies, the aesthetic and the moral activities that they already teach. The fact is that in their own everyday lives teachers actually use their mathematical, environmental, aesthetic and moral skills—these are part of our Scottish culture. The same cannot be said for foreign languages. It follows that primary school teachers will require opportunities to exercise their foreign-language skills, otherwise these will atrophy. Planning for the future then must take account of such teachers' professional development needs for language enhancement. What happens then will depend on whether society is clear about what it wants and is prepared to agree the financial and other support that will be required.

It would be misguided to assume that effective foreign language teaching at primary can only happen where visiting secondary teachers play the dominant role in the team. A suitably trained and educated primary-school teacher is in a very good position to make the 'embedding' approach work, leaving it to the specialists at secondary to build substantially on this. Successful though the staffing model for the pilots was in many respects, our evaluation team found that the content and methods of language teaching in the first years of

secondary did not appear to change greatly to take account of the primary school experience. It can therefore be argued that the proper role of the secondary specialist is to take things forward from seco: dary onwards, to an extent not yet attained. This will require new insights and skills, for example in how to encourage pupils at transfer point to bring out and display all the important things that they have learnt at primary, and in how to interpret, diagnose and respond in appropriate ways to the range of knowledge this is likely to reveal.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES PEDAGOGY AT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Assuming then that an embedding approach will be adopted, how might teachers set about the business of introducing and sustaining a foreign language at primary school? Below, I have set out a number of possible guidelines that arise from research reported on previous pages and that could be of practical application.

■ *Build on pupils' phases of development*

Young learners at primary school do have a capacity for intuitively acquiring at least some aspects of the system of rules and strategies underlying communicative language use. It follows that they must be given classroom activities that as far as possible allow this natural process of acquisition to happen. Such activities will be contextualised and will normally involve pupils as enthusiastic and active participants in non-verbal as well as verbal activity, with a particular emphasis on features such as rhythm, sound, movement, action, body-language, colour, shape and image. As they proceed through primary school, they gradually become more detached and analytical and require induction into types of activity that place greater emphasis on largely verbal activity — the beginnings of CALP, as discussed in Chapter 3.

There is no doubt that young pupils can readily assimilate the sound system of a new language and can absorb, reproduce and imaginatively enact quite large chunks of that language (witness the impressive capacity of pupils in the primary pilots to narrate fairly long fairy stories), without being able to analyse what it is they have absorbed. A major advantage of the early start, then, is that it allows for intuitive learning, in which substantial amounts of language may be absorbed, to be followed at an appropriate time by a more analytical, reflective approach, in which elements of language that originally were absorbed intuitively are now re-visited, re-processed and re-organised to fit in with other elements as the pupil's communicative system expands and becomes more refined.

■ *Build on pupils' existing concepts*

Pupils will make more rapid progress in the language if the concepts they are dealing with are already to some extent familiar to them. If they have to learn totally new concepts as well as the language that represents these, then progress will be slower.

A major aim of the embedding approach will be to extend pupils' conceptual understanding. Concepts with which they are familiar from a Scottish perspec-

tive will take on a wider meaning as they are accessed through the foreign language. Children's concepts of town, village, house, school, food, family, dress, leisure, duty and many other things, including of course their concepts about language (language structure, language acquisition, language learning and language use), can be considerably extended if these are first developed through the first language and then related to a foreign language and its cultures.

■ *Build on pupils' first language*

It has been argued in Chapter 3 that surface fluency in a foreign language can be developed without much recourse to pupils' first language. However, the sort of circumstance in which this regularly occurs is when a young child makes regular and substantial contact with a number of speakers of the other language, including of course children of the same age. School classrooms are very different, with a probable ratio of one teacher (almost certainly a non-native speaker) to 20–30 pupils (also non-native speakers). Busy classrooms of this sort are not the ideal contexts for natural acquisition and it makes sense to build on, rather than block out, the pupils' first language. This, after all, is a unique tool for learning, particularly when the all-important stage of literacy has been reached. In other words, 'language awareness' should be incorporated into the use of language at primary school, including first, second and foreign languages.

While communicative teaching rightly requires maximum use of the foreign language for an ever wider range of purposes as pupils grow older, there is also good reason for engaging pupils in discussion in their first language. This may imply for example the use of a common terminology (perhaps terms such as nouns, verbs, adjectives...) to describe certain categories of word in both languages. It may imply discussion of those features that the two languages have, and do not have, in common; discussion of what pupils think they can and cannot do in each language; and discussion of those strategies that pupils might find useful in further developing and using each language.

■ *Teach the language as a system for use, not as a list*

It has been argued that real language use must have an element of unpredictability in it. If language is taught as a system of rules and strategies, pupils will be more able to cope with this unpredictability and to generate their own language to suit their own purposes. Learning lists of words, structures or functions will not help them greatly in this respect. One possible way of teaching language as a system is to encourage pupils to consider alternatives and effects. This might be achieved by audio-recording or video-recording aspects of their performance, playing this back to them, stopping the tape at particular points, asking the pupil in question to note what he or she said and to consider what else he or she might have said at that point, and what effect this might have had. This encourages the perception that any one conversation (or any other speech event) is only one manifestation of the larger number of potential conversations that pupils' underlying competence might have generated on that same topic.

What the system consists of has been described in the section on communicative competence, with its components of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and cultural competence. Teaching language as a system implies helping pupils to build up their underlying competence in those different areas. This implies learning rules, not only of grammatical structure but also of discourse and social usage; it implies building up a range of strategies for learning and for communication. Evidence from the primary pilots suggests pupils themselves will have very good ideas as to what these strategies might be, so the teacher's job becomes more one of bringing them out rather than putting them in.

Teaching language as a system also implies knowledge of how this system builds up. Foreign languages pedagogy in the past has been based on the assumption that fully correct language should be expected from all learners, whatever their age or stage and whatever the circumstance in which they are performing. This view has now given way to the more informed view that the rule-system governing spontaneous communication builds up (to an important extent) according to its own internal logic rather than according to any sequence in which rules are taught by teachers. In their first language, children's grammatical development proceeds through a one-word, then a two-word, then a three-word... phase. It is not argued here that children's grammatical development in a foreign language should follow exactly the same course, but it does make sense to expect and encourage young learners to be able initially to manipulate combinations of only very few words, and for these combinations to increase over time, only much later approaching the combinatorial powers of a native-speaker. This of course does not prevent children, more or less from the very start, from absorbing and reproducing large chunks of language in the form of stories, poems, songs and other routines, though without much ability to manipulate these spontaneously.

It is useful therefore for teachers to be aware of how children's combinatorial powers may gradually build up through interlanguage stages (containing features that by adult standards are incorrect), and how these may be accompanied by larger prefabricated chunks of 'correct' language. This poses a very interesting problem when one attempts to evaluate pupils' spoken production. How to compare one pupil who produces large chunks of fully-developed language that by adult standards is correct with one who shows much more manipulative ability but at the stage of interim rather than fully developed grammatical forms? Indeed, both manifestations are likely to occur in the one pupil. My view would be that it is better to see both than either one alone.

■ *Encourage precise comprehension of verbal meanings*

Gist extraction is a very good thing, particularly if pupils have taken note of a speaker's non-verbal characteristics such as facial expression, intonation and gesture in order to make an inference as to what the speaker means. However, it is essential that pupils learn to comprehend verbal as well as non-verbal meanings. It is also useful to bear in mind that in everyday exchanges many

verbal meanings (even of apparently simple everyday terms) can be highly personal and therefore not necessarily obvious to others in the group, with the consequence that they may have to be 'negotiated'.

How then may pupils learn to focus on verbal meaning? First by learning that particular meanings are expressed by particular grammatical forms (singular-plural, tense, gender, case...); second by learning to intervene in conversations or in lessons in order to seek clarification; and third by developing their discourse competence to the point that they can for example ask follow-up questions, refer back to a point previously mentioned and add to a point that someone else has made. Therefore, grammar for comprehension, strategies for intervention and skills of discourse have to be carefully and gradually introduced — not on the assumption of course that these will be fully operational by the time pupils leave primary school. If pupils rely mainly on gist-comprehension through non-verbal meanings, there is little reason to suppose that their foreign-language competence will make much progress. It will make progress as soon as they learn to comprehend verbal meanings.

■ *Teach other subject-matter through the foreign language*

There is clear evidence from research on early total immersion and even on limited partial immersion that pupils are likely to develop a better command of the language if they are given opportunities to use it in order to learn some subject-matter outside the language itself. The primary school curriculum is rich in possibilities for this, and the subject-matter may be physical education, art, local environment, mathematics, science, technology, religion or many other things. There is very little motivation for primary pupils in learning a foreign language in order to be able to use it when abroad in (let us say) six years' time. Nor, after a while, is there much motivation in simply associating the language with 'fun' activities. There is much more intensity of motivation in having to learn and use a language in order to come to terms with something that is presented and perceived as being immediately important here and now. Moreover, if pupils are focused on acquiring new subject-matter through the foreign language (whether knowledge of content or skills in performance), this fulfils the criterion of 'focus on meanings' that, according to many authorities, is one of the main agents that stimulates the acquisition process. The gains appear to be considerable and long-lasting. Already, France and Germany are making visible progress in this area. Kästner (1993), for example, indicates that in Germany bilingual programmes in upper secondary schools are forming a new and increasingly visible component of education in the school systems of German states. These programmes build on and expand the 'embedding' model of language teaching at primary school. Across the various federal states there are bilingual programmes in English, French, Italian, Dutch, Spanish and Russian. Among the subjects in which there is content teaching through the foreign language are geography, history, politics, biology, art and sports.

■ *Fire on four cylinders*

The research evidence suggests there is no need to limit foreign language teaching at primary exclusively to what can be achieved through listening and

speaking. Not only can reading and writing be introduced successfully, but the four modes can reinforce each other, particularly once literacy in the first language has been established. It may be helpful to bear in mind that our society is becoming more informational by the hour. Gone are the days when there was normally a substantial time-gap between one person's writing a text and another person's reading it. In some ways, written communication is becoming almost as immediate as spoken communication, for example through the use of fax, electronic mail, databases and other computer software. The developmental sequence of listening before speaking before reading before writing that has characterised various approaches to foreign-language teaching is not inviolate. Some initial evidence at least has been adduced in these pages that a more rounded, integrative approach will benefit the young new-age language learner.

- ***Exploit opportunistic resources***

It would be highly desirable that, where circumstances allowed, use should be made of people in the local community who had a command of the foreign language and a willingness to make this available. This could include foreign nationals and adults (perhaps parents) with a foreign-language qualification. They would not, of course, have responsibility for the programme or for the teaching, but could be a valuable resource alongside the classteacher. It might even be valuable to consider providing a certificated training programme that would qualify them for this supportive role.

- ***Ensure links with the secondary school***

Even though the role of visiting secondary teachers will be greatly reduced, it will still be essential that experiences should be shared through reciprocal visits and joint planning, in order to provide back-up linguistic knowledge for the primary teachers, and to keep the secondary teachers acquainted with primary school developments.

■ *Going beyond the basic model*

Circumstances will vary from one place to another. It may prove possible for some schools to consider going beyond the basic model set out above. If so, research suggests two possibilities:

- ***Partial immersion at primary school***

Small-scale experiments of the sort occurring in Australia (Clyne, 1991), which are based on a limited form of 'partial immersion' may prove feasible in certain contexts in Scotland. If so, then to my mind there would be every reason for trying this out, within an action research model, in order to learn further from the experience. It certainly does appear that children make the best progress when they are challenged to use the foreign language in order to learn or use something that is outside the language itself.

- ***Intensive teaching at secondary school***

At secondary school, it could prove worthwhile to intensify the learning and use of a foreign language for a period of time. The recently reported Canadian study (Lightbown, Spada, 1991) reveals how long-lasting were the effects. This

might be achieved by allocating two to three times the normal amount of class time for a foreign language during one year in the initial period of secondary education. Alternatively it might prove more feasible to identify one subject (in addition to the foreign language), or aspects of a number of other subjects, that would be taught through the medium of the foreign language. The gains appear to be considerable and long-lasting.

One anticipates problems in supplementing the basic model through intensive teaching at secondary, and certainly there can be no question, at present, of achieving this uniformly across the country. However, there is something perverse about an overall strategy in which an 'embedding' approach to language and content is recommended and pursued in primary schools, making high demands on teachers' foreign language capabilities, only to see it all funnel down into the confines of one subject (ie the language itself as a subject) at secondary level. A properly conceived embedding approach ought, in my view, to funnel outwards, not inwards, incorporating increasingly diverse subject matter, as it proceeds from primary and into and through secondary. In short, at primary school it makes sense, firstly, to select a basic model based on embedding that can be achieved by all participating teachers and that will offer all pupils a worthwhile entitlement in a foreign language. Then secondly, it makes sense to see whether, in some if not all schools, this model may be enhanced through the use of staffing and resources that happen to be available. The ensuing variety, provided that it was properly monitored, could lead to valuable insights that would help with the development and wider dissemination of good practice in subsequent years, when resources and staffing were more generally favourable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

No matter what basic model is adopted, and regardless of possible enhancements, a clear implication for foreign languages teachers at secondary school is that they will be receiving children from primary schools who possess a variety of foreign languages competences. In our evaluation we found that primary pupils had developed a reservoir of knowledge of words and phrases that they could not necessarily bring into play in any given activity. Some of this implicit knowledge was almost certainly picked up, intuitively acquired. As such it is fragile and can easily be obliterated by an inappropriate approach at secondary. Secondary teachers must not only therefore deal with pupils' overt language performance but also access and interpret what lies behind it. As such, it becomes important at secondary school to provide opportunities for pupils to re-access and use their implicit store of language, to reflect on it, to widen its range of applications and to turn it into language that they can consciously control and readily use as and when they want. In learning to build on what pupils bring with them from primary schools, language teachers at secondary will of course be no different from teachers of other subjects.

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Teaching Modern Languages at Primary School

Richard Johnstone

This book discusses the issues facing schools, teachers and policy-makers as learning a foreign language becomes part of the primary school curriculum.

Written specifically for those planning and implementing foreign language programmes, it provides an overview of research and development in a number of countries, setting individual programmes within the context of national and local objectives, and teaching approaches within the context of the latest research into language acquisition.

Contents include:

- Current developments
- Research findings on starting age, conditions for learning, the nature of foreign language proficiency, and communication and learning strategies
- The implications for implementing effective programmes

The book will be of particular interest to policy-makers at all levels and for preservice and inservice education, as well as to staff in primary schools and language teachers at secondary.

The author, Professor Richard Johnstone of Stirling University Education Department, is Director of the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (SCILT). He has led a number of research studies including evaluations of Scottish pilot foreign languages in the primary school programmes.

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